Gendering Asceticism in Medieval Sufism

by

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Abstract

Medieval Sufis reoriented the practice of Islamic mysticism away from asceticism and towards a structured program of inner cultivation under the guidance of elite male teachers. This dissertation argues that this inward turn represents a key historical moment in which Sufi identity was deliberately constructed upon idealized elite masculinity to combat rival groups in fifth/eleventh-century Nishapur. While previous scholars suggest medieval Sufism arose out of the Baghdadi context, an examination of the writings of two influential Nishapuri authors, Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) and Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1074), reveals sociopolitical conflicts unique to Nishapur that provoked the formation of an urban institutionalized Sufism that excluded all but the male elite. The gendered consequences of this institutionalization is explored through the legacy of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī and the reproduction of their gendered discourse in the writings of Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and Abū al-Faraj b. al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200). Through a gender-sensitive critical re-reading of asceticism in historicizations of medieval Nishapur, I demonstrate the role of opposition to rival ascetic groups in the institutionalization and perpetuation of elite androcentric Sufism.

This study investigates shifting gendered discourses in representations of four early ascetic practices: bodily mortification (*zuhd*), wandering without provision (*siyāḥa*), sexual abstinence (*ʿuzla*, *ʿafāf*), and excessive voluntary fasting (*jūʿ*, *ṣawm*). The decline in popularity of these exercises came with increasingly more obvious language of gender differentiation in the writings of Sufi authors. Through an intersectional gender analysis that compares elite male depictions of women to those of youths, the enslaved, and racialized individuals, I problematize modern scholarship on Sufism and Islam that employs gender binaries without considering other social markers of difference in Islamicate literatures. I conclude that authors of medieval Sufism reinvented asceticism to oppose those they deemed deviant to their own hegemonic masculinity. Understanding that elite social actors negotiate orthodoxy and regulate practice through the language of gender demonstrates the usefulness of gender analysis as a method of exposing discourses of power in the formation of religious identity.

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1 Introduction

This dissertation explores the formation of institutionalized Sufism in the sociopolitical context of Nishapur, the capital of Khurasan, at the turn of the fifth/eleventh century. This pivotal historical moment illuminates the role of urban factionalism in the construction of an androcentric elite form of Islamic mysticism. Through an intersectional gender-sensitive analysis of medieval Nishapuri biographies of early Sufi men, women, youths and enslaved individuals, I examine the ways in which male authors constructed elite masculinity and tried to present spiritually compelling women, ascetic rivals, male adolescents and enslaved individuals in narratively controlled ways.[1] I explore the creation of gendered boundaries in Sufism in a very specific historical moment when Nishapuri authors Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) and Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1074) constructed and perpetuated an "inward turn" away from externalized ascetic behavior. In doing so, they established normative patriarchal Sufism as the dominant mode of Islamic mysticism.[2] Al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's writings canonized a vast quantity of proto-Sufi discourse

[1] I follow the periodization of Gerhard Bowering in "The Qurān commentary of al-Sulamī," and Ahmet Karamustafa in *Sufism: The Formative Period* and *God's Unruly Friends*. While I use slightly different terminology, I still follow the scheme of dividing Sufi history into five phases: the early/formative period (first/seventh to fourth/tenth century), the classical/early medieval period (fifth/eleventh to mid-seventh/thirteenth century), the late medieval period (mid-seventh/thirteenth to mid-ninth/fifteenth century), the early modern period (mid-ninth/fifteenth to twelfth/eighteenth century) and the modern period (thirteenth/nineteenth century to present). For critical discussions of this periodization, see Elias, "Ṣūfī Tafsīr Reconsidered," 43–44; Godlas, "Ṣūfism," 352–58.

[2] I borrow Karamustafa's term here to describe the development in Sufism away from a life of renunciation and ascetic acts towards a "cultivation of the inner life." Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 1–2.

and subsequently shaped both the structure and content of the most influential Sufi literature of medieval and early modern Islam such as the Sufi manuals of fellow Nishapuri native Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), the hagiographical encyclopedia of Abū al-Faraj b. al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200), the Qur'anic commentary of Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 606/1209), and the treatises of Muḥyī al-Dīn b. al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) as well as the writings of early modern exegetes like the Turkish Jilwati Sufi, Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī (d. 1137/1725) and Morrocan Darqawi author Aḥmad b. ʿAjība (d. 1124/1809). Each of these authors repurposed significant sections of the writings of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī and thus offers insights into the legacy of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī in later medieval and early modern Sufism. Without acknowledging the role of gender and Nishapuri social conflict in the writings of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī, we miss a sizeable portion of the story of the emergence of Sufism as a dominant mode of Islamic piety.

Through an examination of the gendered nature of identity discourse in formative Sufi circles in Nishapur, this dissertation demonstrates the usefulness of intersectional gender-sensitive analysis in undertaking critical history. I offer a re-reading of early Sufism that considers intersecting elements of social identity and power discourse as presented in Nishapuri debates about the true nature of mysticism and asceticism. Through this historical re-reading of Sufism in Nishapur, I bring to light the ways in which early Sufi authors constructed and negotiated boundaries of identity and categories of acceptable behavior at every level of human life, from the political to the communal and personal. I thus reveal how conflicts over political power and religious doctrine impacted the gendering of bodies and institutions, and vice versa, through the assertion of boundaries

around doctrines and practices that were built to maintain and reinforce elite social hierarchies in Nishapur.

This dissertation explores the use of gender as a conceptual language mediating power and orthodoxy in Nishapur through examining shifting discourses around four different ascetic practices that were prominent in the formative period of Sufism: self-mortification (*zuhd*), wandering without provisions (*siyāḥa*), sexual abstinence (*ʿuzla/ʿafāf*) and voluntary fasting/starvation (*jūʿ*, *ṣawm*). All four of these practices fell out of favor in fifth/eleventh century Nishapur with deeply gendered consequences for non-elite, non-male practitioners of Sufism. With reference to changing attitudes regarding these practices, al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī discursively employ selective historical narrativization to construct elite masculinity as ideal Sufism while diminishing the value of these ascetic practices and the membership of non-male and non-elite practitioners of earlier forms of mysticism and asceticism.

This introduction offers an overview of Sufism and the sociohistorical value of the Nishapuri context to studies of gender and the institutionalization of Islamic mysticism. In the second section of this introduction, I survey previous studies of gender in Islam and Sufism that emphasized female predecessors and gendered metaphysics to the detriment of understanding how gender is constructed in different times and places and employed to uphold a variety of normative practices. I engage an intersectional gender-sensitive methodology in this dissertation, the mechanics of which I explain with reference to previous scholarship that investigates social status as a relevant aspect of gender in medieval Islam. Finally, I present the main sources I utilized in my research and explain my choice of primary texts to investigate gender and the construction of medieval Sufism.

A brief overview of the contents of each of the remaining chapters of this dissertation serves as the conclusion to this introduction.

1.1 Sufism

Sufism varies widely in its tenets and practices depending on the geographical region, order affiliation and time period of its practitioners. Some Sufi groups perform loud, communal rituals accompanied by music and instruments while others focus on silent meditative remembrance (*dhikr*).[3] However, in general, Sufis can be said to follow a spiritual program of self-refinement under the guidance of a spiritual master. Academic scholars of Sufism suggest that Sufism as a distinct movement arose in the third/ninth century out of a group of heterogenous and often disparate mystical and ascetic movements in Baghdad that slowly spread beyond Iraq.[4] Baghdadi Sufism, they argue, merged with other localized forms of mysticism and asceticism in Khurasan, Central Asia and Arabia, extending across the Islamic Empire, and later became a cohesive and identifiable tradition of Islamic mysticism.[5] While the Baghdadi context offers insights into the origins of Sufism, Nishapur, the literary and scholarly center of early medieval Sufism, provides glimpses into why Sufism developed away from its origins as a variegated and disparate ascetic movement into a highly regulated androcentric mystical enterprise.

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[3] For an overview of the major classical Sufi orders and some of their key features, see Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 244–58. For more extensive details about these orders, see Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 169–244. Many Sufi orders expanded beyond their towns of origin and took on a variety of distinctive localized practices as they spread. For regional variations of Sufism, see Knysh, 245–94.

[4] Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 2; Melchert, "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E.,"

[5] Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 38.

Many scholars argue it is through the spread and localization of Sufism that Islamic mysticism shed its characteristic harsh asceticism and evolved into a form of "love mysticism."[6] Historians of Sufism often perpetuate a highly gendered characterization of this fundamental transition in the third/ninth century, attributing "love mysticism" to Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya's (d. 185/801) feminine influence and conflating the formative asceticism of early Sufism to Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's (d. 110/728) harsh masculine approach to self-discipline.[7] Such conflations of masculinity with discipline and austerity and femininity with love and cultivating the inner world reify gender binaries that are foreign to the subjects under investigation. In this dissertation, I examine gender as a social discourse that is continuously constructed and negotiated in historically specific ways that cannot be reduced to a universal set of masculine and feminine traits. While the inward turn in Sufism might have gendered dimensions, I argue here that the transformation to inner renunciation is one in which masculinity was renegotiated under new political circumstances rather than being the result of acceptance of a more feminine mode of spirituality. The two main sources for my study, Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī and Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, both demonstrated extreme reticence towards the harsh asceticism characteristic of early and formative Sufism. However, their aversion to externalized asceticism was not because of their devotion to Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya, but due to their own

[6] Schimmel, *My Soul Is a Woman*, 34; Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 13–16, 30–32; Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 1–2; Hoffman, "Oral Traditions as a Source for the Study of Muslim Women: Women in Sufi Orders," 366. For an overview of the scholarly convention of sketching out a move in Sufism from asceticism to mysticism, see Sviri, "Sufism: Reconsidering Terms, Definitions and Processes in the Formative Period of Islamic Mysticism," 31–33.

[7] Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 10, 26; Hoffman, "Oral Traditions as a Source for the Study of Muslim Women: Women in Sufi Orders," 366. See also, Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, 56. Schimmel describes Sufism as "permeated throughout with feminine traits." Schimmel, *My Soul Is a Woman*, 18.

factional leanings, as I will demonstrate below. When we include critical approaches to gender as an important part of the study of Sufism, it becomes obvious how determinative the Nishapuri political context was in the move away from asceticism in medieval Sufism.

Our two Nishapuri authors depicted ideal Sufi masculinity as a pursuit of inner renunciation from the material world. The move from asceticism to mysticism in medieval Sufism occurred at the height of the rise of rival ascetic movements such as the Karrāmiyya in Nishapur and was soon followed by the institutionalization of elite Sufism through a network of physical structures that served as Sufi lodges (*khānaqāhs*). The presence of the Karrāmis as rivals to the elite Sufis of Nishapur prompted Sufi authors to reconstruct asceticism as a program of inner renunciation intended for elite, urban, male Sufi aspirants. This rivalry also aided the urbanization of Nishapuri Sufism and the establishment of exclusionary physical and social boundaries around sites of Sufi practice. Urban androcentric Sufism centered elite male sexual and spiritual subjectivity that discursively excluded non-elite male Sufis as well as female Sufis from evolving practices of Islamic mysticism.

Ascribing asceticism to harsh masculine spiritualities and love mysticism to feminine spiritualities essentializes gender as ontological fixed points rather than social constructs. Conflating masculinity with harshness and femininity with love and gentleness cannot account for all the variations of gendered language and experience in a tradition as diverse as Sufism and remains, in my view, unproductive in studies of early and classical Sufism. It is a key assertion in this dissertation that gender is constructed and reconstructed in Sufi circles in accordance with the political and social conflicts of each time. Leaders of

the Sufi tradition repeatedly negotiate and adapt idealized Sufi ethics to serve their political and social purposes.

1.1.1 The Nishapuri context

Due to the presence of extensive records of Sufi figures in Nishapur, Nishapur offers a rich example of how gender and power are intertwined in Sufi discourses. The work of the Nishapuri authors to narrativize (that is, to construct a selective narrative of) their collective history in gender-specific ways and establish rituals of transmission to convey that narrative into subsequent generations had the result of formalizing Sufism as an androcentric tradition constructed almost exclusively for elite male disciples.

Despite the comparative scarcity of historical references to female Sufi practitioners in medieval Sufism, women were central to the elite networks that established Sufism in Nishapur. Al-Qushayrī initially acquired prominence in scholarly circles through his marriage to Fāṭima al-Daqqāqiyya (d. 480/1088), a woman from one of the patrician families of Nishapur. Despite the social currency he gained through this marriage, he regularly excludes and diminishes women in his Sufi writings. Al-Qushayrī's marriage to Fāṭima al-Daqqāqiyya allowed him access to her father Abū ʿAlī al-Daqqāq's (d. 406/1015) expansive networks of Sufi intellectuals and proffered him the opportunity to take over the training of Sufi disciples after al-Daqqāq's death. While he himself relied on his teacher al-Sulamī for much of his work, unlike al-Sulamī, al-Qushayrī does not mention very many prominent Sufi women by name, not even his wife Fāṭima—despite the fact she was well-educated and held a number of official *dhikr* sessions while also training her descendants

in Sufi ethics and practice.[8] Fāṭima, like al-Qushayrī, was trained both by al-Daqqāq and al-Sulamī. Given her public role in ḥadīth sessions, Fāṭima was likely both aware and to some extent involved in discussions about rival movements and debates about normative practices of asceticism. Fāṭima was by no means unique in her spiritual accomplishments, as later biographers including her grandson note dozens of elite Nishapuri women involved in Sufi practices and rituals of poverty and austerity. Thus, there is a great contradiction in the crucial role of Nishapuri women played in the establishment of elite Sufi networks and their simultaneous lack of visibility in written Sufi histories. My critical historical analysis of gender discourse in Nishapuri literature illuminates how this disparity between historical reality and literary presentation is a deliberate exercise that served the formation of medieval Sufism.

Any major changes in doctrine or practice necessarily come with a redrawing of boundaries. I take the evolution of Sufism away from asceticism to mysticism (the inward turn) as a formative moment to explore how the history of Sufism came to be constructed in highly gendered ways. Using a gender lens, we can determine why and how male Sufi authors incorporated new practices while eliminating others through a study of changing discourses around the subject of asceticism. Because Nishapur was also the site of other

[8] Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam*, 2013, 126–38. Sayeed argues that gendered barriers to travel and public sessions caused a decline in female participation in the field of transmitting ḥadīth immediately prior to the classical period. The fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth century by contrast saw a slight increase in female transmission of ḥadīth, though subsequent generations experienced a decline. Overall, the number of female transmitters of ḥadīth named in biographical encyclopedias has remained significantly lower than that of men. This is comparable to the Sufi tradition, where, overall, there was a gradual decline in citations and mentions of female participants in the Sufi tradition.

native ascetic movements, it offers us a unique view of how the Nishapuri Sufis constructed asceticism to serve broader sociopolitical aims.

In this dissertation, I read Nishapuri sources through the lens of gender to ascertain how Sufism was constructed and contested through discourses of power in the writings of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī. Gender is a key field through which male Nishapuri authors chose to assert power in a period of complex political rivalries. Without examining how Sufis employed gender as a language of power against rival groups like the Karrāmis, it is difficult to parse out why certain boundaries were erected around particular Sufi ascetic practices and discern why Sufi history evolved away from a diverse membership into an elite androcentric institution turned inwards upon itself.

Nishapur was an important center of Sufi activity in the medieval period. Honingmann and Bosworth describe Nishapur as an important economic center in the medieval Persian empire with a flourishing bourgeoisie.[9] Because the Sufis of Nishapur were part of this elite class of bourgouisie (the "patrician class" in Richard Bulliet's terminology), their economic prosperity and political connections allowed them to establish and perpetuate Sufi institutions and practices as well as collect and distribute a range of Sufi writings. Later Sufis relied heavily on the scholars and teachers of Nishapur for their own writings and institutional practices.

Ahmet Karamustafa focuses his analysis of formative Sufism on Baghdad, highlighting the centrality of Baghdadi natives such as Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd (d.

[9] Honigmann and Bosworth, "Nīshāpūr."

298/910), Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz (d. 286/899) and Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī (d. 295/907-8) in the development of Sufi networks. In my view, his analysis overemphasizes Baghdad as the site from which Sufism emerged. He acknowledges several similar ascetic movements that emerged around the third/ninth century all over Khurasan, Transoxania and Arabia and in many of the major cities of the ʿAbbāsid empire. Yet Karamustafa attributes the bulk of Sufi identity and practice to the Baghdadi school in the third/ninth century.[10] Similarly, Christopher Melchert describes Sufism as an "importation from Iraq" that later merged with native Khurasani social movements.[11] While the term "Sufi" may indeed have arisen in the Baghdadi context, these accounts of early Sufi history obscure the role of Nishapuri authors in standardizing and perpetuating Sufism as a distinct social movement and identity.

The significance of Nishapur as a center of evolving Islamic discourse more generally was noted by Walid Saleh in his work on the Qur'anic exegete Abū Isḥāq al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035).[12] Martin Nguyen also recognized the impact of Nishapur's unique political context on Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, who became a primary authority in later developments in Sufism.[13] Both Saleh and Nguyen offer clear overviews of the extent of scholarly activity and output in medieval Nishapur. However, a gender-sensitive analysis of Nishapur as a center of Sufi debate demonstrates Nishapur was not simply an important center for the production of Islamic knowledge. It was determinative in the formation of

[10] Karamustafa, 38.
[11] Melchert, "Sufis and Competing Movements in Nishapur," 237.
[12] Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition*, 25–28.
[13] Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar*, 32–42.

classical Sufism largely due to the sociopolitical threat that rival ascetic movements posed to Nishapuri Sufi leaders. [14]

Margaret Malamud points to the centrality of Nishapur in developing key Sufi institutions including the *silsila* (chain of authority passed down from master to disciple) and the *khirqa* (the cloak that marked the initiation of a spiritual disciple).[15] Malamud, along with Bosworth and Melchert, has also noted the impact of the presence of the Karrāmis as a rival ascetic movement in the formation of Nishapuri Sufi identity. The Karrāmis were austere ascetics in rural Nishapur whose doctrines were rejected by the urban Sufi elite.[16] Some scholars have argued that, despite Sufi antipathy to the Karrāmis, the Karrāmiyya greatly influenced the development of Sufi institutions. Jacqueline Chabbi and Martin Nguyen have suggested that Sufi lodges were modelled after the *khānaqāhs* of Karrāmis in Nishapur.[17] However, Melchert and Nguyen note it was ultimately the influence of another native Nishapuri ascetic movement known as the Malāmatiyya that determined the development of dominant modes of Sufism.[18] I argue the Karrāmiyya had

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[14] Nishapur has received notice as a center of Sufism in the sociohistorical analyses of several other scholars, though none have explored gender discourses as determinative in the establishment of Nishapuri Sufism. See, Bosworth, "Nīshāpūr"; Bulliet, "The Patricians of Nishapur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History"; Jong, Algar, and Imber, "Malāmatiyya"; Malamud, "The Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan"; Melchert, "Sufis and Competing Movements in Nishapur."

[15] Malamud, "Sufi Organizations and Structures of Authority in Medieval Nishapur," 428.

[16] Very little is known about the Karrāmiya as historical records of them are written by their opponents and are consequently polemical in nature. For some background, see Malamud, "The Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan"; Bosworth, "Rise of the Karāmiyyah in Khurasan"; Bosworth, "Karrāmiyya."

[17] See Chabbi, "Khānḳāh"; Nguyen, "Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar: Abū'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī and the Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt," 67. Whether or not the Karrāmis influenced Sufi institutions, many Sufis resisted Karrāmis on issues of doctrine, praxis and socioeconomic status. As a result, Nishapuri Sufis often defined themselves in contradistinction to the Karrāmis.

[18] Melchert, "Sufis and Competing Movements in Nishapur," 238–41. Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar*, 62–69.

more of a lasting influence on normative Sufism than has so far been proposed when gender is taken into account. Given the prominence of multiple ascetic movements in Nishapur that fueled debates about the validity of various ascetic practices as well as the impact of Nishapuri authors on later Sufi literature, Nishapur deserves deeper study as a vital part of the emergence of Sufism in medieval Islam. Exploring the tensions between the Malāmatiyya and the Karrāmiyya in early medieval Nishapur offers up competing discourses of asceticism that can be analyzed to discern what was incorporated and what was discarded in the evolution of Sufism. The influence of Nishapuri social history on the development of Sufism is easy to overlook if focus remains on Baghdad and if power dynamics and gendered discourses are neglected in examining the sociohistorical context of the rise of Sufism. In asking why Sufism shifted away from asceticism as a primary mode of practice in the Nishapuri context, gender analysis offers us key answers through investigations of how Sufi identity was constructed in conflict and resistance to rival movements in Nishapur.

In studying Sufi history, we rely on written texts to trace intellectual development and the emergence of doctrines, practices, and ideas. These written texts are extremely limited in scope and perspective. The Sufi oral sources that constitute the bulk of lived Sufi history are now unavailable to us except through written records authored by elite male individuals. Their selective narrativization centers the events of their lives and the lives of other similarly elite male predecessors. To find women, non-elite men and other marginalized individuals, we have to read at the edge of these male-authored texts. Valerie Hoffman offers some methodological reflections on the use of oral history in the study of medieval women, suggesting written records have inherent limitations and should be read

as inaccurate reflections of people and events.[19] The oral traditions we receive from Sufi women are filtered through the subjective experiences of elite male scholars. Thus, my study offers some methodological paths forward through the heavy narrativization of male authors. This aids our journey towards understanding the sociohistorical underpinnings of the historical records we receive.

Despite the bias in the sources, when read critically and comparatively, Sufi hagiographies, manuals and Qur'anic interpretations offer insights into contemporary debates that can remain invisible without both a diachronic and synchronic critical approach to the sources. My analysis of early Sufi history investigates the most influential writings on Sufism, which largely rely on two Nishapuri authors and those they influenced who came after them. The earliest Sufi writings penned by Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī and Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī continue to be formative sources upon which medieval and later Sufi authors modelled their writings and perspectives. In preserving the biographies of early Sufi figures and exploring discourses and debates of asceticism, the influence of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī is palpable throughout subsequent written Sufi history.[20]

Al-Sulamī pioneered a number of genres of Sufi writing including encyclopedic Sufi Qur'anic commentaries (*tafsīr*), biographical compendias of ascetic and mystical predecessors (*ṭabaqāt*), and Sufi ḥadīth compilations. Each of these genres were professionalized endeavors already utilized in mainstream Sunni circles. By repurposing

[19] Hoffman, "Oral Traditions as a Source for the Study of Muslim Women: Women in Sufi Orders."
[20] The emergence of specialized Sufi literature had a great impact on the diffusion and cohesion of Sufism. See Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 83–113. For a discussion of al-Qushayrī's influence on later Sufi authors, see Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar*, 10–13.

these genres as vehicles for the conveyance of Sufi historiography and teachings, al-Sulamī began the process of gathering disparate ascetic and mystical movements away from the margins of Muslim pious practices towards the center of Sunni religious discourse.

These transplanted professionalized genres differ in two significant ways from other less professionalized genres of Sufi writing such as manuals, autobiographies, and poetry. Firstly, Sufis who made use of professionalized genres often implemented elements originated by ḥadīth specialists such as *isnāds* (verifiable chains of transmission). Thus, al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's *tafsīr* and *ṭabaqāt* works cite chains of predecessors as sources for a variety of teachings and aphorisms. Meanwhile both authors omit many of these chains in their manuals. Secondly, in professionalized genres, Sufis often include fewer mentions of female and non-elite predecessors. Al-Sulamī composes a separate work from his *Ṭabaqāt* in which to memorialize his female predecessors. He mentions only Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya in his *tafsīr*, adding some references to Fāṭima al-Naysabūriyya in the appendix to the commentary, *Ziyādāt ḥaqa'iq al-tafsīr* (Additions to the Realities of Exegesis).[21] In both cases, mentions of women largely appeared in appendices to al-Sulamī's major professionalized works. Al-Qushayrī chooses to omit women completely from both his *tafsīr*, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* (The Subtleties of Allusion) and the *ṭabaqāt* portion of his *Risāla fī ʿilm al-taṣawwuf* (Epistle on Sufism). Instead, he chooses to relegate references to women to the manual portion of his *Risāla*, often making use of female as well as non-elite male characters in stories to highlight the preeminence of elite male Sufis. The use of gender to construct homosocial worlds in *tafsīr* and *ṭabaqāt* literature may indicate a

[21] Sulamī, *Ḥaqa'iq al-tafsīr*, Q35:6. Sulamī, *Ziyādāt ḥaqa'iq al-tafsīr*, Q11:22, Q13:4, Q37:5, Q56:51.

predilection to align professionalized genres with idealized prescriptive androcentric discourse while building some marginal room for women and non-elite individuals in less professionalized literature. The ways in which gender is employed in different genres of Sufi writings helps us understand how elite male authors negotiated social ideals and attempted to control variants from their hegemonic ideals through the mediums they deemed most critical to garnering and maintaining religious authority.

I chose Nishapur as the central site through which to explore Sufism, not only because of the effect of competing ascetic and mystical movements on discourses of identity that became prominent in the Sufi historical canon, but also because of a unique chain of authors whose writings represent an unbroken trajectory of Nishapuri Sufi historical writing for five generations. Al-Sulamī represents the beginning of this chain. He recorded the histories and biographies of nearly two hundred prominent proto-Sufi men and women in the two generations preceding him. He served as al-Qushayrī's teacher and al-Qushayrī modelled his own manuals of Sufism and biographies of predecessors after al-Sulamī's writing, with some key changes including the excising of female biographies.[22] Al-Qushayrī trained his grandson Abū Bakr al-Fārisī (d. 529/1134) in Sufi knowledge and practice. Al-Fārisī authored a history of Nishapur detailing the lives of Nishapuri locals in the two generations after al-Qushayrī. Al-Fārisī's history of Nishapur helps us understand the impact of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's legacy because al-Fārisī no longer writes in a context impacted by the presence of the Karrāmis and yet reproduces the gendered

[22] Al-Qushayrī's use and modification of al-Sulamī's hagiographical and biographical sources is discussed in Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar*, 68. Also see, Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī*, 100–101.

discourses of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī in some key ways. Thus, these three authors offer five generations of Nishapuri history in an unbroken chain and with direct influence from each other.[23] Additionally, al-Sulamī's historical records were reproduced by Abū al-Faraj b. al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200) and al-Fārisī's were replicated by Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Ṣarfīnī (d. 641/1243), each with some interesting variations. These later recensions offer comparative views from outside of Nishapur and are the major primary sources utilized in Chapters four and five.

We also have the writings of Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. 627/1221), both natives of Nishapur who made use of al-Qushayrī and al-Sulamī as sources, but, like al-Fārisī, lived after the decline of the Karrāmiyya. After al-Qushayrī took over the *madrasa* (school) of Abū ʿAlī al-Daqqāq, he trained Abū ʿAlī al-Farmadhī (d. 470/1048) who took Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī on as a Sufi student. Al-Juwaynī, a theologian who also seems to have attended Sufi sessions with al-Qushayrī, also trained al-Ghazālī in Ashʿarī theology. Al-Ghazālī continued the legacy of al-Qushayrī's marriage of Sufism, Ashʿarī theology and Shāfiʿī fiqh. His magnum opus, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (The Revival of the Sciences of Religion) echoes al-Qushayrī's *Risāla* in emphasizing the importance of adherence to Islamic law and in presenting a sober Sufism focused on the reinforcement of gendered boundaries constructed upon elite urban masculinity. Al-

[23] While al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī are regularly mentioned in conjunction to each other, al-Fārisī is often only used as a source of biographical details about his grandfather al-Qushayrī, see Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar*, 24–25; Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī*, 99. Asma Sayeed discusses al-Fārisī's biography of his grandmother, addressing the influence of al-Sulamī on both al-Qushayrī and Fāṭima al-Daqqāqiyya. Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam*, 126–38. No scholar has yet put al-Sulamī, al-Qushayrī and al-Fārisī together to trace lineages of developing Sufi ideas in Nishapur. Because I look at these scholars' impact on the narrativization of Sufi history, their connection to each other proves useful in charting the ongoing influence and reception history of key ideas.

Ghazālī, like al-Qushayrī, was heavily involved in androcentric institutions and taught both in the *madrasa* and in the *khānaqāh* system in Nishapur. Thus, al-Ghazālī's writings represent the result of the intervention of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī in the development of Nishapuri Sufism and Islamic mysticism more broadly. I thus make use of al-Ghazālī's elaboration of the contributions of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī to medieval Sufism in Chapter five.

Al-Ghazālī, along with ʿAṭṭār a century after him, offers glimpses of the legacy of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī in the city of Nishapur in the generations following the rise and fall of the Karrāmiyya. Thus, the context and contributions of what I call the Nishapuri triad (al-Sulamī, al-Qushayrī and al-Fārisī) can also be studied through the persistence and development of their legacy within and beyond the fifth/eleventh-century context. Nishapur is well-represented in Sufi primary texts, making a combined diachronic and synchronic analysis relatively easy to undertake and offering a rich source of sociohistorical insights into the development of formative and classical Sufism.

1.2 Gender in medieval Islamic sources

Gender-sensitive analysis offers a useful method for identifying the edges of constructed boundaries by throwing discourses of power into relief. A gender-sensitive analysis entails gathering implicit and explicit constructions of and references to gender and investigating the ways in which these constructions of gender are put to work in diverse and often contradicting ways to justify beliefs and regulate practices. As Sa'diyya Shaikh explains it, a gender-sensitive methodological approach to medieval texts understands the multivalent patriarchal constructs employed by medieval authors while acknowledging

contradictions and ambivalence in their gender discourse.[24] Including intersections of gender with social class, enslaved status, and racialization of non-Arabs illuminates invisible mechanisms of social hierarchy by foregrounding power dynamics.[25]

When I consider intersections of gender with other social markers of differentiation in my analysis, I draw on Kimberlé Crenshaw who theorizes that gender discrimination can be compounded by the added burdens of deviations in race and social class from the hegemonic ideal.[26] However, Crenshaw utilizes intersectionality to recommend fairer treatment of Black women in contemporary American discrimination law. Contrastingly, I use intersectionality to analyze male-authored literary presentations of medieval Nishapuri free and enslaved women, racialized individuals, youths and non-Muslims. This means, while I utilize Crenshaw's theory to better understand how elite male authors narrativize women and non-elite individuals from a subjective political and social standpoint, I do not address how elite male narrativizations of social others reflected contemporary real-life circumstances. Instead, I offer ways to apply Crenshaw's intersectional approach to literary analysis of hagiographies to reveal how elite male authors selectively employed or willfully collapsed or ignored intersectional identities in their narratives of Sufi history to better construct tropes and further marginalize their othered counterparts and thus construct an androcentric ideal of Sufi life. I also make use of Crenshaw's approach to further nuance

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[24] Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, 26. Thanks to Rose Deighton for helping me thinking through some of this gender-sensitive methodology.
[25] For a discussion of how social class impacted the regulation of women's activities and the discourse on appropriate female comportment, see El Cheikh, *Women, Islam, and Abbasid Identity*, 6–8.
[26] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," 139-40.

scholarship on gender in Islam by considering overlooked markers of gender variance in medieval Islamicate societies including race, age, social class, and religious affiliation. A critical and intersectional gender-sensitive analysis of Nishapuri Sufi writings at the juncture between the formative and classical period reveals the lasting consequences of evolving discourses on those who came to be marginalized from centers of Sufi practice through constructions of gender that rendered them other. This gendered discourse resulted in long-term consequences for all who practiced Sufism, male or female, rich or poor.

Proceeding from the premise that gender is socially constructed through discourses of power, I note specific ways gender is conceived and mapped out on bodies and institutions in Nishapur through an analysis of depictions of a variety of ascetic practices. A common obstacle in addressing gender in historical contexts is the imposition of modern constructions of the gender binary on distinct social cultural discourses. Afsaneh Najmabadi notes the pervasive impact of modern notions of gender binaries on readings of the Islamic past and how it obscures constructions of gender that are unique to Islamicate milieus.[27] A predilection to seeing things through a gender binary obfuscates many nuanced aspects of Islamicate societies in the medieval period. It also naturalizes the gender binary and leaves its social construction and perpetuation invisible. In studying Islamicate contexts, scholars often overlook the existence of categories of *mukhannaths*

[27] Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, 3; Najmabadi, "Beyond the Americas: Are Gender and Sexuality Useful Categories of Analysis?," 12–14. See also, Geissinger, *Gender and Muslim Constructions of Exegetical Authority*, 2015, 25, 34–35.

(men who took on stereotypically female comportment),[28] *amrads* (male adolescents),[29] *rajulas* (women who took on stereotypically male comportment),[30] intersex individuals,[31] eunuchs,[32] enslaved individuals, and others who represented various forms deviations from the elite male ideal.

Alternative discourses of gender beyond the modern gender binary are a significant part of Sufi expressions of spirituality. For example, pederasty (sexual relationships between adult men and male adolescents) is commonly utilized metaphorically in Sufi descriptions of spiritual love and idealized beauty.[33] While many Sufi authors spoke out against such practices and disparaged the sexual temptation involved in keeping company

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[28] Najmabadi defines the *mukhannath* as "an adult man desiring to be an object of desire for adult men" and *amrad* as "young adolescent male" rather than a child or a boy. Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, 3. While some translate *mukhannath* as "effeminate man," Najmabadi attributes the feminization of the category of *mukhannath* to modern heternormalization. Instead, she advocates that the *mukhannath* and the *amrad* (beardless male adolescent) be read as unique gender categories. Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, 15–17.

[29] The *amrad* is a specific category of male youth in the period immediately prior to the growth of his beard. The *amrads* were considered a representation of idealized beauty in Sufi and medieval Muslim circles. For debates about the precise age of *amrad*, see El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*, 30–31. Also, Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, 15–16. For some information on the role of the *amrad* in Sufi rituals of *samāʿ* (spiritual music auditions) that involved gazing upon these youths, see Ridgeon, *Awḥad Al-Dīn Kirmānī and the Controversy of the Sufi Gaze*. For a general discussion of controversies regarding gazing at beardless youths, see El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*, 2005, 111–17.

[30] Geissinger, "Applying Gender and Queer Theory to Pre-Modern Sources," 11-15. There is also a separate category of *ghulāmiyāt* (female transvestites) who had positions as entertainers in the ʿAbbāssid courts. Rowson, "Gender Irregularity as Entertainment: Institutionalized Transvestism at the Caliphal Court in Medieval Baghdad," 47–48.

[31] Gesink, "Intersex Bodies in Premodern Islamic Discourse: Complicating the Binary."

[32] For an overview, see Ayalon, "On the Eunuchs in Islam." For a discussion of eunuchs as non-gendered or indeterminately gendered individuals, see Marmon, *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Society*, 62–63. For a thorough investigation of the social construction of the gender of the eunuch's body in the formative period, see Pökel, *Der Unmännliche Mann*.

[33] Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, 15–25.

with beautiful male youths,[34] a number of Sufi figures including Yūsuf b. Ḥusayn (d. 304/916-7), ʿAyn al-Quḍāt Ḥamadānī (d. 525/1131) and Awḥad al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. 635/1238) were known to enjoy intimate relationships with male adolescents (sometimes referred to as beardless youths). Despite its critics, because pederasty was an openly discussed and sometimes idealized social reality for some Sufis up to (and in some regions beyond) the early modern period, the depiction of male adolescents is a significant area of gendered discourse in classical Sufism. Especially pertinent is the use of these iterations of dominant male/subservient male engagements as a metaphor for the God/human relationship in elite Persian circles. Sufi poets sometimes gendered God as a beautiful male youth to symbolize the ideal Beloved in an evocative manner.[35] Beholding male youths developed as a Sufi ritual practice known as *shāhid-bāzī* or *naẓar ilā al-aḥdāth*. In such rituals, adult male Sufis would gaze upon male youths sometimes in conjunction with *samaʿ* (whirling/musical audition rituals) in order to contemplate divine beauty through them.[36] The age of these beardless youths played a key role in gendering them as objects of desire, with the ideal age of these adolescents being at the threshold of puberty when they would undergo transition from the object of adult male desire to the role of "desiring subject."[37]

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[34] These male adolescents were considered acceptable avenues for adult male desire in the medieval period. See El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*, 33–34; Dunne, "Homosexuality in the Middle East: An Agenda for Historical Research," 57–58.

[35] For a discussion of the use of the Qur'anic story of Joseph as a pretext for God as embodied in young male beauty, see Yaghoobi, "Yusuf's 'Queer' Beauty in Persian Cultural Productions," 247–48.

[36] Ridgeon, *Awḥad Al-Dīn Kirmānī and the Controversy of the Sufi Gaze*. For later resistance to such practices and relationships with beardless youths, see Ze'evi, *Producing Desire*, 88–93.

[37] Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, 15.

Age influenced the perception of women's gender status as well, particularly with regards to male legalists who negotiated women's presence in mosques and other areas of public assembly on the basis of their age.[38] In *Women in the Mosque*, Marion Katz isolates instances in which older women (*mutajallas*) are depicted as a distinct class of individuals to whom jurists applied different legal rulings with regards to mosque attendance based on their presumed lack of sexual availability and desirability.[39] That older women could occupy some spaces that their younger counterparts could not in the eyes of some male jurists indicates the level to which gender discourse is not static but can be bent to serve different social and legal purposes. Due to the dynamic use of gender discourse to enforce systems of power, gender should be factored into historical analysis.

Slavery, too, had gendered implications in medieval Muslim literature. Kecia Ali explores the parallels between marriage and slavery contracts in classical Islamicate societies, highlighting the analogous depiction of wife and enslaved status in Islamic legal literature.[40] Idealized masculinity in classical Islam was constructed and performed by free, elite, able-bodied men, and thus enslaved men represented deficient masculinity through their social status. Ali notes the ambiguity of the relative status of an enslaved man to his female owner and demonstrates how this ambiguity, when addressed, was resolved through a radical exclusion of women of higher social status from the rights and ranks of their male counterparts.[41] While it is difficult to pinpoint exactly whether or not the male status of an

[38] See Katz, *Women in the Mosque*, 3, 20–24.
[39] Katz, *Women in the Mosque*, 20–21, 46.
[40] Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*, 6–8.
[41] Ali, 14–15.

enslaved individual superseded an elite woman's free status as the discourse on the matter is unclear, we know enslavement was utilized as a marker of deficient masculinity in medieval Islamic literature. The lack of reference to the exact social position of a free woman vis-à-vis an enslaved man indicates the highly androcentric nature of medieval Islamicate discourses of gender. While the relative social positions of male individuals was clearly delineated in legal literature and included considerations of age, free social status, and religious affiliation amongst other factors, the particularities of the status and behaviors of female individuals particularly in relation to male social inferiors were neglected and subsumed under a broad conception of women's general inferiority to men.

In addition to the construction of gender through age and social class, "race" also plays a significant role in Sufi perceptions of ideal masculinity.[42] Orfali and Saab note in the introduction to *Sufism: Black and White* that the Qur'an and prophetic traditions associate piety with "whitened faces," and wretchedness with "blackened faces."[43] Sufis have employed similar racialized metaphors to construct spiritual hierarchies. In many Sufi writings, idealized white-faced men represent perfect beauty and superior spiritual rank with contrasting depictions of the temptations of "blackened"-faced women who hold corruptive material influence over male aspirants on the Sufi path.[44] The notion of

[42] I use the terms "race" and "racialization" to indicate when an individual is depicted as other through markers of skin tone deemed divergent from the Arab/elite Persian ideals. For a survey of how scholars have avoided discussions of race, deeming it modernist, up until recently and why race theory is beneficial in the study of 'Abbasid history, see McLeod, "Race, Rebellion, and Arab Muslim Slavery," 2–5. For a broader discussion of race discourse in the Middle Ages, see Hahn, "The Difference the Middle Ages Makes."
[43] Lange, "On That Day When Faces Will Be White or Black"; Sīrjānī, Orfali, and Saab, *Sufism, Black and White*, 13-16. Lange argue that the use of skin color to describe spiritual status should be treated as racial Discourse. Lange, "On That Day When Faces Will Be White or Black," 429, 437.
[44] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 155, 413, 423; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 137, 392, 402.

blackening the face of a corruptive woman and the use of fair countenance as a marker of high levels of spirituality indicates the layered dimensions of gendering in Sufism, which requires an intersectional critical analysis to fully comprehend.

Joan Scott noted in 1986 that gender is a "primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated,"[45] and added that inequalities in power are organized along at least three intersecting axes: class, race and gender.[46] This dissertation explores the extent to which, in al-Qushayrī's context in particular, these three axes do not just intersect but define the other in his conception of idealized Sufi personhood. Certain performances and forms of masculinity, *rujūliyya*, could be achieved by women if they occupied the rank of a learned elite intellectual and could be lost by men if they were impoverished, enslaved, or simply held beliefs an elite male author considered heretical or heterodox. For this reason, a study of female Sufis alone is insufficient for a gender analysis of Sufi discourses.

When we consider pederasty, enslavement, and racialized metaphors of spirituality, it is clear that binary constructions of gender fail to accurately convey the array of gender discourses represented in medieval Islamicate contexts. Premodern Sufi writers employed gender as a complex interplay of masculinity, femininity, race, sexuality, spiritual accomplishment, age and social class. For this reason, this study engages an intersectional analysis to gain a fuller picture of what gender meant to Nishapuri Sufi authors and how gender was employed to erect and perpetuate a distinct form of Sufism that Nishapuri authors considered ideal. Using an intersectional gender-sensitive methodology, this

[45] Scott, "Gender," 1069.
[46] Scott, 1054.

dissertation offers critical tools for re-reading historical sources in ways that illuminate social mechanisms that lie beneath the surface.

Studying gender construction through depictions of individuals who occupy diverse social roles denaturalizes gender as a binary. Rather than a gender binary, many medieval Muslim authors including al-Qushayrī and al-Ghazālī assume a hierarchy of masculinities in their writings. Ash Geissinger notes that traditional Islamic sources do not offer a unitary gender system but employ a variety of discourses of gender that seem to share a hierarchal view that places freeborn Muslim adult, sane and able-bodied men as the normative ideal.[47] Geissinger analyzes exegetical materials attributed to early Muslim female figures who are quoted in classical *tafsīr* works and concludes that early and classical Muslim authors constructed gender as a hierarchy in which free elite men represented most completely actualized human physical, intellectual, and spiritual capacity. All other gendered bodies were thought to differ by degrees of variation from this ideal.[48]

In early and medieval Islamicate societies, free men embodied the social ideal by performing an elite form of masculinity. These free men conceived of enslaved men, men who took on comportment stereotypically associated with women, eunuchs, and male youths as representative of deficient forms of masculinity. Women, feenslaved men and young girls occupied inferior social positions to their male counterparts given their perceived lack of masculine qualities. However, the relative position of any particular man

[47] Geissinger, "Applying Gender and Queer Theory to Pre-Modern Sources," 7.
[48] Geissinger, *Gender and Muslim Constructions of Exegetical Authority*, 2015, 35. See also Chapter 2 of Pökel, *Der Unmännliche Mann*.

and a woman relied on a complicated network of factors including social status, age, and education. Thus, in Islamicate contexts, gender is relative and operates in webs of significance that engages intersecting aspects of social identity. Understanding Islamicate writings through the lens of a gendered hierarchy populated by degrees of masculinity requires an acknowledgment of other social hierarchies, as in the case of enslaved men whose gendered status sat below that of the ideal free elite man and in some contexts that of their elite female owners.[49] Given the complicated nature of gender discourse in classical Islamicate texts, it is difficult to assign a clear and coherent gender system. Nevertheless, we can discern that ideal masculinity was not simply tied to physiology but a number of other social factors as well.[50] The gaps in these complicated discourses of gender offer spaces in which to examine the negotiation of power and identity.

In such androcentric models of gender, elite male authors acknowledge alternative masculinities even while disparaging them. Contrastingly, women and alternative femininities are rarely even addressed. To illustrate the prevalence of utilizing masculinity as the only frame of reference, we can analyze a highly gendered anecdote from ʿAṭṭār's *Tadhirat al-awliyāʾ*. ʿAṭṭār depicts Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya in an argument with a male naysayer over the shortcomings of each of their genders. Her male interlocutor challenges her, stating men are favored above women as they have been prophets while women have never been prophets. Rābiʿa, for her part, argues that women may not have been prophets,

[49] Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*, 48.
[50] El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*, 2005, 15, 153.

but they have also never had the egoism and self-worship of Pharaoh, adding, "Women have never been *mukhannath*."[51]

Twentieth and twenty-first century scholars have faced difficulty translating the term *mukhannath*, in part because there is no English equivalent to the term. Moreover, the ways that scholars attempt to explain what "*mukhannath*" means have shifted over the last several decades. Arberry translates *mukhannath* as "hermaphrodite" while Losensky renders it "pederast."[52] Neither of these interpretations are accurate translations of the term as the *mukhannath* was not necessarily an intersex individual and pederasty was, at the time, considered a performance of masculinity. Ash Geissinger defines the *mukhannathūn* as an identifiable group of individuals in medieval Muslim contexts socially considered neither fully male or female. So they operated as a class of gender-ambiguous entertainers whom others perceived to be deficient in masculinity due to their taking on stereotypically female behaviors such as adorning themselves with henna.[53] The existence of these variously gendered male individuals contradicts modern notions of a gender binary. For this reason, Afsaneh Najmabadi argues against the use of the term effeminacy when describing premodern male individuals in Islamicate contexts who behaved in ways

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[51] ʿAṭṭār, *Muslim Saints and Mystics*, 42; ʿAṭṭār, *Memorial of God's Friends*, 110.

[52] Everett Rowson addresses the changes in application of the term *mukhannath* over time, from singers and entertainers to men performing femaleness to passive recipients of male-male sexual intercourse. Rowson, "Gender Irregularity as Entertainment: Institutionalized Transvestism at the Caliphal Court in Medieval Baghdad." By the time ʿAṭṭār is writing, *mukhannath* constituted a gender category as well as a passive sexual role in male-male relationships. However, *mukhannath* does not refer to a "pederast," who represents the active partner in male same-sex relations. For more on pederasty, see El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*, 2005.

[53] Geissinger, *Gender and Muslim Constructions of Exegetical Authority*, 2015, 33–34. For some history on the *mukhannathūn*, see Rowson, "The Effeminates of Early Medina"; Rowson, "Gender Irregularity as Entertainment: Institutionalized Transvestism at the Caliphal Court in Medieval Baghdad."

stereotypically considered female. Najmabadi states it is modern interpretations of history that impose categories of effeminacy on these different behaviors of male individuals whenever they do not espouse the elite masculine male ideal.[54]

ʿAṭṭār's presentation of Rābiʿa's argument indicates that he specifically understood this category of *mukhannath* as a male attribute and not female, though it represented a deficient form of masculinity to ʿAṭṭār and his contemporaries. This anecdote reflects the efforts of elite men to construct idealized Sufi masculinity in contradistinction to other gender categories. Thus, the *mukhannath* here functions as a sexual stereotype conflated with deficient masculinity. Both Pharaoh in all his egoism as well as the *mukhannath* in Rābiʿa's examples represent "failed" masculinities.[55] ʿAṭṭār justifies Rābiʿa's position in his hagiographical encyclopedia of male Sufis by describing her as a "man on the path of God," (*rajul*, *mard* in Persian). Thus, Rābiʿa shows up her male interlocutor by demonstrating her superior understanding of ideal masculinity. As I demonstrate in this dissertation, male Sufi authors regularly utilize female Sufis as a foil when constructing and affirming their idealized notions of elite masculinity. The discourse of masculinity affirmed in this anecdote presents ambiguous gender as a form of masculinity rather than its own category of gender expression. Thus, the masculine is constructed as the frame of reference.

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[54] Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, 3, 15–17, 59–60, 237.

[55] I owe thanks to Ash Geissinger and Jeannie Miller for helping me analyze ʿAṭṭār's anecdote for conceptions of gender and masculinity.

By categorizing Rābiʿa as more than an exceptional woman, but an honorary man in her devotions and by depicting ambiguous gender performance as a deficient form of masculinity, ʿAṭṭār perpetuates the use of the masculine as a measure by which to compare all human beings.[56] Women who achieve renown as pious individuals are depicted by male authors as one of them, while men who fall short of idealized masculinity due to behavior, doctrine or social status are deemed deficient men. The male is the frame of reference for all individuals and so, despite the exceptional accomplishments of Rābiʿa, she is reintegrated into patriarchal ideals by being lauded through language that privileges an androcentric point of view.

As ʿAṭṭār's anecdote illustrates, medieval Sufi authors construct gender as a hierarchy of masculinities in which some women participate should they demonstrate compelling spiritual or intellectual prowess. The androcentric medieval gender hierarchy engages some limited forms of femaleness, but often as an expression of deficiency or lack of maleness. In this way, gender construction in premodern Islamic sources can be read in terms of a hierarchy of masculinity or lack thereof. In a hierarchy of elite and deficient masculinities, femaleness is negotiated by each male author according to his immediate goals and context. Despite this indeterminate use of women as inferior social categories, often medieval Islamic and Sufi texts conflate female and feminine with embodiment, the material world and weakness.[57]

[56] Schimmel, *My Soul is a Woman*, 78–79.
[57] Kueny, *Conceiving Identities*, 58–59.

Afsaneh Najmabadi acknowledges that diverse performances of female gender are often overlooked in the study of Islam but she does not address alternative expressions of femaleness herself.[58] Ash Geissinger begins some of this important work on alternative femininities, arguing that the *rajula*, the woman who takes on male garb or comportment, is labeled sinful and constructed as the opposite of the pious woman in the third/ninth century ḥadīth compilations. Meanwhile, in works on obscure ḥadīth vocabulary from the fourth/tenth century on, none other than the prophet's reputedly favorite wife, ʿĀʾisha bt. Abī Bakr (d.58/678) is praised as a "*rajula*" because she is deemed man-like in her intelligence and level of knowledge.[59] This offers us further expressions of the mutable boundaries male authors seem to have erected around gender performance at their discretion. It is difficult to understand how women, having little share in authorial voice in the medieval period, constructed their own genders in the literature. Thus, the women depicted in the male-authored literature we have often operate as narrative devices in the writings of men.

The reinforcement of ideal masculinity, the devaluation of alternative masculinities, and the comparative neglect of femininities are all crucial aspects to understanding gender in Islamicate social contexts as textually constructed and examples of discourses of power. Thus, this dissertation engages the construction of masculinity in addition to the negotiation of femininity in medieval Sufi sources to determine how

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[58] Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, 3. Arezou Azad explores a few anecdotal reference to early mystic women wearing the garb of men or otherwise taking on their comportment, terming such behavior "reverse genderization." Azad, "Female Mystics in Medieval Islam: The Quiet Legacy," 77. Azad does not spend much time on the gender implications of such behavior or the broader gender discourses of early Sufi circles of belief and practice.
[59] Geissinger, "Applying Gender and Queer Theory to Pre-Modern Sources," 14.

medieval Sufi identity emerged. The large number of studies on alternative masculinities in Islam has unfortunately tended to reinforce the textual centering of the male subjective gaze.[60] Because the bulk of our sources are written by elite men, this gaze is maintained both in primary sources as well as secondary scholarship. To the extent possible, I try to correct for this by acknowledging and analyzing the ways in which Sufi women's gender as well as the gender of non-elite men were constructed in Nishapuri sources.

For this dissertation, whenever masculinity is invoked as an ideal or taken as standard and whenever someone is marked to varying degrees as deviant from this ideal standard of masculinity, I note disruptions in the prescriptive social order presented by the scholars from whom we receive our written records. These disruptions of the male subjective gaze offer some room for theorizing the construction of gendered discourse through language, institutions, key debates, and practices. A gender-sensitive analysis of male-authored texts makes visible significant disputes over power and identity and thus offers us ways of understanding why certain boundaries were laid down and around whom. Rather than try to impose a coherent schema of gender on my subjects here, I follow Sa'diyya Shaikh's recommendation of finding disruptions in the text to locate historically specific and contextualized discourses that shape the texts.[61] While Shaikh uses disruptions in Ibn al-ʿArabī's writings to serve a hermeneutics of reconstruction and provide gender egalitarian readings of Sufism, the task I set myself here is not to uncover gender egalitarian

[60] See Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*; El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*; Ridgeon, *Awḥad Al-Dīn Kirmānī and the Controversy of the Sufi Gaze*; Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*.
[61] Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, 27.

readings or to read liberatory possibilities into patriarchal texts.[62] Instead, I use disruptions in the text to read past the idealized worlds elite male authors constructed in their writings and locate moments in which they tried to reabsorb anomalies back into their ideal constructed worlds in specifically gendered ways. By examining the process of reabsorbing anomalies, I want to illuminate the ways boundaries and categories are constructed and negotiated for early Sufi authors to understand how we construct and maintain our identities in ways that impact every level of human life, from the political to the communal and personal.

Sufism as a subject of inquiry benefits from gender-sensitive analysis as Sufi authors regularly employ gender as a language to explain spiritual doctrine and to regulate spiritual practice.[63] Annemarie Schimmel and Jamal Elias both explore the ways in which Sufi discourse at times conflates women with the lowly material world and at other times champions female ascetics and mystics as exemplars of spiritual attainment. The tension between certain representations of the feminine metaphysically and women in practice is, for Schimmel reconciled in Sufism's latent potential to allow for women's practices and grant women authority.[64] For Elias, the tension is resolved in his staggered scheme in which the celestial woman as a reflection of divine creative potential occupies a superior role to that of a male human being, while earthly women occupy an inferior role to men as human beings possessing diminished intellectual and religious capabilities in gendered discourses of the intellect.[65] Sachiko Murata similarly argues for a feminine higher reality that

[62] Shaikh, 25.
[63] Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 426–35; Elias, "Female and Feminine in Islamic Mysticism."
[64] Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 426.
[65] Elias, "Female and Feminine in Islamic Mysticism," 219–20.

supersedes the hierarchical yang/yin schema of the mystical Islamic cosmos.[66] While all these scholars contributed understandings of the multifaceted use of gender in Sufi writings, my study does not try to reconcile the disjointed use of the feminine in Sufi writings as they did. Rather, I make use of these contradictory uses of femaleness and the feminine to explore the mechanisms of gendering as a method of creating boundaries around doctrines and practices.

Given the androcentric nature of both Sufi discourses and institutions arising out of the medieval period, I argue Sufism was forged in the crucible of gendered ideology in more ways than scholars of Sufism have thus far noted. Studies of gender in Sufism so far have largely fallen into two categories. The first category of studies tries to unearth Sufi women from the past to present female antecedents to modern Sufi scholars and practitioners.[67] The second category of studies explores the use of gender as a language of Sufi metaphysics.[68] A new third phase of scholarship only recently emerging in the field is now uncovering the ways in which Sufi institutions and practices are constructed upon the ideal of the elite male body.[69] My gender analysis of Nishapuri Sufism fits into this third phase and contributes a deeply critical investigation of how a gendered framework came to dominate mystical Islam through mechanisms that initiated aspirant Sufi men into idealized elite masculinities.

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[66] Murata, *The Tao of Islam*, 1992, 196-7.
[67] Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics*; Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999; Cornell, *Rabi'a from Narrative to Myth*; Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014.
[68] Schimmel, *My Soul Is a Woman*, 1997; Murata, *The Tao of Islam*; Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*; Shaikh, "In Search of Al-Insan."
[69] Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*; Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*; Geissinger, "Female Figures, Marginality, and Qurʾanic Exegesis in Ibn al-Jawzī's Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa."

The third phase in the field of gender and Sufism explores the construction of gender differences as having moral and political implications for marginalized individuals. A saying from the seventh-eighth/thirteenth-fourteenth century reads, "The seeker of the world is feminine (*muʾannath*), the seeker of the otherworld is *mukhannath*, and the seeker of the Lord is masculine (*mudhakkar*)."[70] The construction of these three categories conflates the gendered body with its moral and ethical choices. Kugle explores the relationship between the gendered body and moral discourse, describing the body as, "highly charged with symbolic, social, and ethical significance." [71] Kugle argues that social constructions of the body are ever-changing and always function either as "a marker of communal belonging or a signifier of sacred difference."[72] Consequently, he connects the development of specific Sufi institutions to localized social discourses as enacted upon the gendered bodies of Sufi saints within their particular social and political context. Shahzad Bashir understands Sufism as a tradition transmitted through the idealized male body by means of clasping hands, emulating one's master, and pursuing proximity to the body of Muḥammad.[73] Bashir's focus on the male body as the channel of transmission in Sufism highlights the discursive implications of androcentrism as they extend beyond language and into physical spaces and behaviors. Ash Geissinger offers theoretical insights into the

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[70] Schimmel, *My Soul is a Woman*, 1997, 76; De Sondy, *The Crisis of Islamic Masculinities*, 156. As with Arberry and Losensky, the two translations offered for *mukhannath* in this saying are "passive pederast" (Schimmel) and "hermaphrodite" (De Sondy). Both these translations are inaccurate and misleading, so I left the work *mukhannath* untranslated above to indicate the in-between gender status implied by the saying. For an alternative use of gender to express the hierarchical relationship between master and disciple, see Malamud, "Gender and Spiritual Self-Fashioning," 89–90.
[71] Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*, 6, 9.
[72] Kugle, 6, 9.
[73] Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 5–6, 13.

ways in which the marginality of female figures has a literary function that reinforces certain "looking relations" that normatively center elite male authority.[74] These scholars offer critical tools for exploring the nuances of mutable and ever-changing discourses of gender construction across a variety of literature. The various gender schemes I address in this dissertation are rooted in these scholars' notions of the intersection of a variety of social and gender hierarchies in the discursive depiction of practicing Sufi bodies. I thus try to establish any conceptualizations of gender through the specific historical context of my Sufi subjects in fifth/eleventh-century Nishapur.

To address gender in the construction of Sufism, I contextualize al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's understanding of gender in the discourses and debates of their cultural and political milieu. I offer an analysis of gender and masculinity as constructed through Nishapuri elite class systems and Ashʿarī-Shāfiʿī notions of Sunni orthodoxy. This also entails studying not just women but other non-elite gendered individuals who these authors deemed unusual, heterodoxic or heretical. This has taken my study beyond analysis of references to women alone. Thus, I engage references to non-elite men, adolescents, enslaved individuals, non-Muslims and others who, in al-Qushayrī's presentation in particular, were considered deviations from the ideal masculine subject.

The fact that women at times are depicted as attaining some form of honorary masculinity indicates the ability of male authors to reabsorb anomalies in their social contexts back into their hegemonic gender systems or to reconstruct them as acceptable

[74] Geissinger, "Female Figures, Marginality, and Qurʾanic Exegesis in Ibn al-Jawzī's Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa," 2–3.

variations of the ideal whenever they deem it necessary. Re-examining such disruptions and constructions of gender in different historical contexts denaturalizes the coherence of the categories of gender.[75] Katherine Kueny surveys a variety of legal, exegetical, medical and zoological texts to understand the various constructions of the maternal body and the ways in which discourses of maternal bodies reinforce patriarchal understandings of the inherent deficiency of femaleness. Kueny emphasizes the liminal nature of the maternal body in discursive texts and the ways in which male authors have employed different frameworks of intelligibility for different purposes.[76] Sufi authors, too, make use of gender through different frameworks of intelligibility to achieve different ends. Thus, I focus my analysis on four ascetic practices to illuminate the ways in which authors utilized gender to shape the discursive possibilities of Sufism based on their unique sociopolitical concerns.

The ways in which anomalous individuals are incorporated into or rejected from hegemonic discourses of power affect how cities are mapped out and how political systems are negotiated. Martha J. Reineke addresses the relationship between political boundaries and gendered bodies in her article, "This is My Body: Reflections on Abjection, Anorexia, and Medieval Women Mystics." In the context of medieval Christendom, she argues the treatment and depictions of the bodies of female mystics mirrored ongoing issues in society at large. Reineke interprets ascetic starvation as a fracturing of the body that reflects conflicts in medieval Christian society and argues that social and political ruptures are "writ

[75] Najmabadi, "Beyond the Americas: Are Gender and Sexuality Useful Categories of Analysis?," 19.
[76] Kueny, *Conceiving Identities: Maternity in Medieval Muslim Discourse and Practice*, 5-6.

small" on women's bodies. [77] The relationship between bodies and boundaries has also been explored by Mary Douglas in discourses of purity,[78] as well as, in Islamic Studies, by Scott Kugle who describes a number of Sufi saints upon whose bodies ideals and practices were inscribed.[79] A significant portion of this dissertation explores how conflict in Nishapuri society was inscribed on the bodies of differently gendered Sufi practitioners, both elite and otherwise, in a number of clear and distinct ways.

The intersectional gender-sensitive methodology I undertake in this dissertation includes an analysis of how gender is constructed in certain texts, the work that gender does for the authors of these writings, and the ways in which the negotiation of gender mirrors ongoing social and political negotiations of power on a broader scale while simultaneously functioning as a mechanism of political change. Power is negotiated using gender and gender is constructed using power. Through foregrounding the conceptual language of gender in constructions of ideal Sufism, new perspectives on historical Sufi movements emerge. Studying women alone provides limited glimpses into negotiations of identity and power as women are far from the only group of individuals to be marginalized in cultural systems that enact various forms of patriarchy. Thus, an intersectional approach to gender that integrates analysis of class, race, social status, age, and religious affiliation yields a fuller understanding of shifts in discourses of power.[80]

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[77] Reineke, "This Is My Body," 245.
[78] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 142, 160–61.
[79] Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*, 52–60.
[80] Using an intersectional approach in Islamic studies has been the subject of recent critique, given the conflation of intersectional approaches with social justice aims. See Siddiqui, "Good Scholarship/Bad Scholarship: Consequences of the Heuristic of Intersectional Islamic Studies." I use the term in this dissertation as a shorthand to indicate the need in Sufi studies for a comparative gender analysis of elite and

1.2.1 Women in Sufi sources

While there are a significant number of anecdotes about ascetic and Sufi women in early Sufi writings compared to other genres of Islamic literature, male entries consistently outnumber those of women.[81] The majority of female subjects of fifth/eleventh-century biographical literature are placed in the formative period (first/seventh to fourth/tenth century) and mentions of women gradually disappear from Sufi writings after the seventh/thirteenth century with a few key exceptions, the most noticeable being Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya (d. 185/801).[82] It is only close to the early modern period that remain extant any writings from female Sufi authors directly.[83] Thus, the written history of Sufism remains largely androcentric and unrepresentative of the broader circles of non-elite and non-male Sufi practitioners.[84] Scholars of Sufism have attempted to recover and reclaim Sufi women's stories by reading at the edge of male-authored Sufi texts. At times, this has yielded glimpses of Sufism as practiced by women. Mostly, it has indicated how much of written Sufi history obscures the complex lived realities of a range of non-elite social actors.[85]

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non-elite men and women, enslaved individuals, youths, non-Muslims and those who performed gender in ways alternative to the hegemonic ideals of their contexts.

[81] For a critical analysis of this discrepancy in numbers, see Melchert, "Before Ṣūfiyyāt." For a quantative analysis, see Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections*, 6–10.

[82] Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics*; Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections*, 92–93; Cornell, *Rabiʿa from Narrative to Myth*.

[83] Here, I am referring to ʿĀʾisha al-Bāʿūniyya (d. 922/1517) as the first female Sufi author with extant writings. She lived in Damascus under the Mamluks. For details of her life, see Homerin, *Aisha Al-Ba'uniyya*.

[84] El Cheikh, "Women's History: A Study of al-Tanūkhī," 129.

[85] For the problem of historicity in Sufi biographies, Homerin, "Writing Sufi Biography," 389–90.

The limited sources on women in written Sufi history have led some scholars to isolate patterns of "women's Sufism." Maria Dakake suggests female Sufis enacted a theology of domesticity in which they cast their spiritual experiences through their understandings of God as patriarch and husband. Dakake writes, "While, in many ways, the devotional attitudes of Sufi women are similar to those reported of Sufi men, their…image of the divine Beloved…[is] metaphorically conceptualized as the masculine object of their female longing…more "domesticated."" [86] Rkia Cornell describes the spirituality of Sufi women as one rooted in a "theology of servitude" based on al-Sulamī's use of the term *mutaʿabbida* (literally, "one who makes herself a slave") to describe the women in his biographical encyclopedia.[87]

Despite these patterns, Christopher Melchert's content analysis of Sufi biographies reveals very little divergence in practice across genders with only slight exceptions in the realms of service to other Sufis and undertaking silence as a practice.[88] Ultimately, Silvers notes, "There is little historical value in identifying a "spirituality" particular to women…".[89] As al-Sulamī's entries denote, women's practices varied widely depending on geographical location and so did their points of view. Thus, a women's Sufism is difficult to ascertain, particularly through male-sourced Sufi history.

When members of institutionalized Sufism looked back into their past and sought to designate founding figures from the early period, they included some prominent women

[86] Dakake, "Guest of the Inmost Heart," 72.
[87] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 54.
[88] Melchert, "Before Ṣūfiyyāt," 2016, 125–36.
[89] Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014, 29.

in their reconstruction of their past in part because these women had already achieved renown in the cultural complexes to which institutional Sufism laid claim. Many early pious and ascetic women thus became known as "Sufis" even though the term may have been foreign to them. The most famous of these early "Sufis" by far is Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya, also known as Rābiʿa al-Baṣriyya. Rābiʿa is cited by a notable number of men of the classical Sufi tradition including Abū Nasr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, Muḥyī al-Dīn b. al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273), as well as the Damascene female mystic ʿAʾisha al-Bāʿūniyya (d. 923/1517). Often, Rābiʿa is the only Sufi woman cited by name in Sufi writings, thus she often functions as the token Sufi woman.[90]

A number of medieval male Sufi writers referred to Rābiʿa as a woman in form but a "man" in spirit, the most famous being Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār who included her as the only woman in his Sufi hagiographical opus.[91] By offering her an honorary male status, male Sufis distinguished her from other women and rendered her exceptional.[92] Rābiʿa continues to be referenced across geographical regions and represents a salient example of women's access to Sufi authority being mediated through male endorsement. Denise Spellberg notes how Rābiʿa, like ʿAʾisha bt. Abī Bakr, the prominent wife of Muḥammad, is treated with

[90] The two main academic sources on Rābiʿa's life, teachings and her appearances in Sufi literature are Smith, *Rābiʿa the Mystic*; Cornell, *Rabiʿa from Narrative to Myth*.
[91] ʿAṭṭār, *Memorial of God's Friends*, 97–98.
[92] Cornell explores the consequences of this type of gendered exceptionalism in her introduction to her translation of al-Sulamī's biographical dictionary of female Sufis, Cornell, "Introduction," *Early Sufi Women*, 18.

an exceptionalism that rests on her disassociation from the rest of her gender.[93] Rābiʿa's exceptional status has translated into a broad range of material about her, most of which is difficult to verify historically. In *Rabiʿa from Narrative to Myth*, Rkia Cornell sifts through voluminous anecdotes about and sayings attributed to Rābiʿa and distills this information into a number of archetypes attributed to Rābiʿa, most of which have little historical basis.

Many legends about Rābiʿa have accrued over time and her life story is shrouded in mystery beneath layers of fabrication. Rkia Cornell suggests that, beyond the existence of a famous Basran woman, nothing about Rābiʿa can be known except the long tradition of "master narratives" that make her more of an icon than a historical figure.[94] Rābiʿa also became the measure by which other pious women were measured in Sufism, resulting in women from later periods of time being designated as "the Rābiʿa of her age."[95] The use of gendered language to make an exception for Rābiʿa amongst ranks of men, intended to laud exceptional female mystics, reveals the extent to which gender operated as a means by which to mediate and organize individuals in socially prescribed ways.

Aside from Rābiʿa, a number of male Sufi writers memorialized other women from the formative period of Sufism. These women are often neglected in later Sufi writings. The earliest of these male hagiographers of mystic women is the aforementioned Abū ʿAbd

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[93] Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past*, 59. This exceptionalism is explored as a method of integrating anomalous women into broader social patriarchal systems in Chapter Five of this dissertation. Like Spellberg, I analyze textual reconstructions of female figures to determine how male authors try to reconcile anomalous aspects of female predecessors. However, unlike Spellberg, I compare depictions of women to depictions of other marginalized individuals to get a fuller picture of idealized Sufi masculinity and the broader field of gender discourse in particular medieval Muslim societies.
[94] Cornell, *Rabiʿa from Narrative to Myth*, 4–7.
[95] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 234–35.

al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī who recorded details of the lives and teachings of eighty-two women from across the Islamic empire who lived between the third/ninth and forth/tenth century in his *Dhikr al-niswa al-mutaʿabbidāt al-ṣūfiyyāt* (Memorial of Pious Sufi Women). Al-Sulamī relies on Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj for many of these early female ascetics and mystics, although al-Sarrāj includes no biographical details for most of these women beyond their names.[96]

Some of the more prominent female figures al-Sulamī includes in his *Dhikr al-niswa* are: Muʿādha al-ʿAdawiyya (c. 2nd/8th century), one of the earliest female ascetics and *muḥaddithas* (female transmitters of ḥadīth) with a network of female students in Basra; Shaʿwana (c. 2nd/mid-8th century) a dark-skinned singer who was known as a public preacher and proficient Qur'anic reciter; Fāṭima al-Naysabūriyya (d. 223/838), who travelled extensively and taught a number of well-known Sufi men including Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣri (d. 245/859) and Abū Yazīd Bistāmī (d. 234/848 or 261/875); Rābiʿa bt. Ismāʿīl (d. c. 3rd/9th century) who is notable for her spiritual and ascetic devotions within the confines of her marriage to Aḥmad b. Abī al-Ḥawārī (d. 230/845 or 244/860); and Ḥukayma al-Dimishqiyya (c. 3rd/9th century), the teacher of Rābiʿa bt. Ismāʿīl and part of an extensive network of Syrian female ascetics.[97]

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[96] Some academic scholars have analyzed the number of Sufi women cited in Sufi biographical literature, with some offering important biographical details of these women. See Smith, *Muslim Women Mystics*; Smith, *Rābiʿa the Mystic*; Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections*, 91–109; Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*; Melchert, "Before Ṣūfiyyāt"; Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women."

[97] For details on the context and practices of these prominent early Sufi women, see Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014.

While al-Qushayrī makes use of much of al-Sulamī's writings and teachings, al-Qushayrī does not reproduce the biographies of any female Sufis. He names only a few of the women from al-Sulamī's *Dhikr al-niswa* in his *Risāla*. Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya is the only woman he names more than once. No woman is named in al-Qushayrī's Qur'anic commentary *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, even though he quotes a few rhyming verses from Rābiʿa anonymously, as Ibrāhīm Basyūnī notes in his Arabic edition of al-Qushayrī's Qur'anic commentary.[98] Al-Qushayrī mentions Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya by name in the body of his *Epistle* without offering her an entry in the lineage of Sufi predecessors. This suggests he could allow a limited form of authority on the part of some exceptional women. However, I argue his use of Rābiʿa is entirely for the purpose of narrative pedagogy, i.e. to edify men through the use of atypical women. By way of comparison, two women are cited by name in al-Sulamī's *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr* (The Realities of Exegesis), Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya and Fāṭima al-Naysabūriyya. Al-Sulamī includes both these women along with eighty others in his biographical encyclopedia. Al-Qushayrī's excision of women from his writings is a deliberate omission and deviation from his teacher, though al-Qushayrī's approach is more consistent with other male authors. Thus, al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī both act as prominent sources of gendered discourse in this analysis given their intentional use and/or selective omission of women and non-elite others throughout his writings.

After al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī, we turn to al-Qushayrī's grandson Abū Bakr al-Fārisī, who memorialized twenty-six women in his *al-Siyāq lī-tārīkh Naysābūr* (The

[98] Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif Al-Ishārāt*, 3:691. Rkia Cornell discusses the anonymization of female voices in "Introduction," *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 16–20.

History of Nishapur).[99] Al-Fārisī includes a significantly long entry on his grandmother, al-Qushayrī's wife, Fāṭima al-Daqqāqiyya (d. 480/1088). Fāṭima was a prominent ḥadīth scholar and the daughter of Abū ʿAlī al-Daqqāq (d. 405/1015), the man who served as al-Qushayrī's Sufi master before al-Sulamī.[100] Al-Fārisī tells us that Fāṭima hosted circles of learning and passed on ascetic teachings to her daughter Amat al-Raḥīm who passed them on to al-Fārisī's sister, Amat al-Ghāfir Durdāne (d. c. 6th/12th century).[101] Al-Fārisī memorializes Durdāne as an ascetic (*zāhida*) who underwent long periods of intense prayer and silence.[102] He also writes of his aunt Karīma who refused to wear silk.[103] The Daqqāq-Qushayrī women thus represent a network of elite women in fifth/eleventh-century Nishapur who participated in Sufi teachings and practices and passed them on to their female kin.

Al-Fārisī records a few instances of austere ascetic practices amongst other women of Nishapur beyond his family network. He describes a woman by the name of al-Ḥurra who secluded herself and only spoke to people from behind a veil and Sittik who gave her wealth away to dervishes.[104] All the women al-Fārisī memorializes come from prominent patrician families in Nishapur, and their familial influence offered them the time and

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[99] As far as I am aware, the only scholars to analyze al-Fārisī's female entries are Richard Bulliet in "Women and the Urban Religious Elite" and *The Patricians of Nishapur*, as well as Asma Sayeed, who focuses on two specific women who were involved in the transmission of ḥadīth. Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam*, 108–43.

[100] Fārisī and Ṣarfīnī, *Al-Muntakhab min al-Siyāq li-Tārīkh Naysābūr*, #1431. For al-Qushayrī's Sufi pedagogical training, see Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar*, 66–67.

[101] Fārisī and Ṣarfīnī, *Al-Muntakhab min al-Siyāq li-Tārīkh Naysābūr*, #1431, #1485.

[102] Fārisī and Ṣarfīnī, #688.

[103] Fārisī and Ṣarfīnī, #1485. The refusal to wear silk can be read as a performance of religious masculinity, given prohibitions against men wearing silk in Islamic jurisprudence. Women's performance of elite masculinity is analyzed in Chapter Five.

[104] Fārisī and Ṣarfīnī, *Al-Muntakhab min al-Siyāq li-Tārīkh Naysābūr*, #660, #799.

resources to engage in the practices they did. While al-Sulamī includes some Nishapuri women born into patrician families or prominent Sufi kinship networks, many of al-Sulamī's women were non-elite ascetics who took up the company and service of an accomplished master. Al-Fārisī's focus on the elite women of Nishapur indicates the narrative of Sufi history gradually centered women with privileged access to religious texts and rituals over their non-elite counterparts. This shift took place over the duration of only a couple of generations in Nishapur. The depiction of increasingly more elite women in later Sufi records indicates that social hierarchies and religious boundaries affected women in different ways depending on their social class and location. The elite women of Nishapur represent some key practices some associated with women's participation in Sufism including donating money, food or goods (*rifq*) to local Sufi orders. In some cases, these elite women provided financial capital as an endowment to establish Sufi educational institutions.[105] There are indications that some Sufi men would reject such donations due to their female source, or at least make a show of doing so.[106] This points to complicated negotiations of gendered social dynamics in Sufi history.

After al-Fārisī, Abū al-Faraj b. al-Jawzī adds details to al-Sulamī's biographies of women while also including women from intervening generations. Ibn al-Jawzī's entries include none of the women from al-Fārisī's *Tārīkh Naysabūr*, despite Ibn al-Jawzī living in the generation immediately after that of al-Fārisī. Ibn al-Jawzī's omission of al-Fārisī's entries is not surprising, given al-Sulamī's inclusion of Sufis from a range of cities and

[105] Salamah-Qudsi, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety*, 2018, 69–71.
[106] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 142–43.

regions and al-Fārisī's narrow focus on notable individuals from the patrician classes of Nishapur. It seems Ibn al-Jawzī was not particularly interested in the Nishapuri notables that al-Fārisī memorialized.[107] Rkia Cornell notes that, while al-Sulamī memorialized female mystics and ascetics for their religiosity and intelligence, Ibn al-Jawzī tailored his entries on women to foreground their womanhood and diminish their spirituality in favor of that of men.[108] As this dissertation will show, this is one of many marked shifts in presentations of women over the course of the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth century. Whatever the motivations may have been for these authors to recognize female predecessors in such historically specific ways, these records of women are useful in offering glimpses into how male authors approached gender and authority with different aims in mind.

We have a few more sources for Sufi women from Nishapuri authors after al-Fārisī. Al-Ghazālī mentions the women around Muhammad regularly with some sparse references to Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya and Rābiʿa bt. Ismāʿīl in his *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (The Revivification of the Religious Sciences).[109] Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. 618/1221) offers an entry on Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya alone and includes a justification of her inclusion amongst otherwise male entries.[110] Sourced from al-Fārisī's writings, Ibrahim b. Muhammad al-Ṣarfīnī's (d. 641/1243) *al-Muntakhab fī al-siyāq lī-tārīkh Naysābūr* (Selections from the History of

[107] For one exception, see Bulliet, *Patricians of Nishapur*, 171.
[108] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 46; Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, 46.
[109] Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn*, 1:313, 2:58, 2:237, 3:103, 4:47.
[110] For some analysis of how ʿAṭṭār attempts to justify the inclusion of a woman as a female saint, see Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past*, 58–59.

Nishapur) adds a few extra details to the biographies of Nishapuri individuals and notably expands the entry on Fāṭima al-Daqqāqiya.[111]

As this section on women in Sufi sources has illustrated, women are cited in a number of Sufi writings, but the details offered are often sparse. Many male authors chose not to record the names of their female companions or predecessors while others chose to mention only Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya as someone exceptional and therefore unlike the rest of womankind. Other women are named in earlier written sources but disappear in later sources. When women do appear, they are often depicted in highly narrativized ways that serve broader androcentric discourse, as the rest of this study will reveal. This brief sketch of the presence of women in Sufi writings demonstrates the relatively limited number of women cited in male-authored writings.

1.3 Sources

The main sources of my study of the gendering of asceticism in Nishapuri Sufism are Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī's *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyyā* (The Generations of the Sufis), his *Dhikr an-niswa al-mutaʿabbidāt al-ṣūfiyyāt* (Memorial of Pious, Sufi Women), and Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī's *al-Risāla al-qushayriyya fī ʿilm al-taṣawwuf* (The Epistle of al-Qushayrī in the Science of Sufism). These three texts constitute the works upon which much of later Sufi hagiographies and manuals rely. I used Rkia's Cornell critical Arabic

[111] Asma Sayeed notes that Frye's edition of al-Fārisī's *Tārīkh* is missing an entry for Karīma al-Marwaziyya (d. 463/1070), a traditionalist famous for transmitting al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* collection. While Sayeed chooses to utilize al-Ṣarfīnī's *Muntakhab* as a primary source of al-Fārisī's *Tārīkh*, I treat them as two separate works given the additions not found in Fry's edition. Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam*, 2013, 115n19. Until a critical edition of al-Fārisī's work is produced, it will be difficult to reconcile al-Ṣarfīnī's designation of his work as a *muntakhab*, an abridged selection of entries, with the fact that it includes more entries and details than al-Fārisī's original.

edition in conjunction with the edition Cornell produced for Nour Pourjavady's collection of al-Sulamī's *Dhikr* to collect my data.[112] I compared the Arabic of both these editions to the 1998 ʿAṭā edition of the *Ṭabaqāt* in which the *Dhikr* is attached as an appendix. These three Arabic editions very rarely differ in the reproduction of the Arabic text. However, given that all three relied on a single manuscript from Saudi Arabia, some difficult to read portions are interpreted differently. Cornell and ʿAṭā offer no notes on these discrepancies in the text, though they provide important biographical and historical notes. In contrast, Pourjavady's edition offers critical notes on the manuscript. For the purposes of this dissertation, I found it most useful to use the three editions alongside each other. I use Cornell's edition in my citations.

While I benefitted from Cornell's English translations of al-Sulamī's female entries, I offer my own throughout this dissertation as my reading of al-Sulamī is informed by different perspectives than Cornell. For example, Cornell's translations are informed by her theory that there existed a female school of *futuwwa* (Sufi chivalry) called *niswān*.[113] Her translations reflect this position and so she translates *min kibār al-niswān* as "one of the greatest practitioners of female chivalry," instead of the more literal, "one of the greatest women."[114] In such cases where my translations differ widely from hers, I note it with an explanation of my reasoning.

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[112] Cornell's edition of the Arabic corrects many of the errors in the original Ṭanāhī Arabic edition. Cornell, "Introduction," *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 44–46. Pourjavady's edition includes notes absent from the Cornell version. Sulamī, *Majmūʻah-ʾi āṯār-i Abū ʻAbd al-Raḥmān Sulamī*, 1369, 485–87.
[113] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 66–69.
[114] Sulamī, 210–11, 214–15.

I made use of the 2009 Khalīl al-Manṣūr edition of al-Qushayrī's *Risāla*, which is an updated version of the two Arabic editions Alexander Knysh relied on for his translation. I checked Knysh's translations against the Arabic and thus have updated some of the translations he offers mainly for the purposes of consistency and only rarely due to a disagreement in translation, which I note. For al-Fārisī, I relied on both Frye's *The Histories of Nishapur*, a manuscript reproduction of *Kitāb al-siyāq lī tārīkh Naysabūr*, as well as the Arabic edition of al-Ṣarfīnī's *Muntakhab kitāb al-siyāq lī tārīkh Naysabūr* which reproduces al-Fārisī's book with some additions.

My Nishapuri sources form the central line of my inquiry. However, I read these sources in conjunction with a number of other texts to illuminate the impact of Nishapuri politics on Sufi thought by comparing what was beyond al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's immediate context. My central thesis here is that Nishapuri authors had a vested interest in narrativizing Sufi history in a particular way. Therefore, I include in my analysis the writings of Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988) and Abū Bakr al-Kalabādhī (d. 380/990) who act as sources of what was happening before the emergence of Nishapur as a center of Sufism and cast Nishapuri interests in relief. I also utilize the biography of Abū Saʿīd b. Abū al-Khayr (d. 440/1049) and Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Hujwīrī's (d. 465/1072) *Kashf al-Maḥjūb* as two sources contemporary to al-Qushayrī outside of the immediate context of Nishapur who nevertheless interacted with and were evidently influence by al-Qushayrī. Finally, in the fourth and fifth chapter, I investigate Ibn al-Jawzī's *Ṣifat al-ṣafwā* as a repackaging of Nishapuri hagiographies of women in a new context to determine how the

legacy of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī evolved past fifth/eleventh-century Nishapur.[115] I also make use of al-Ghazālī and Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār's writings as two examples of Nishapuri natives living within a century and a half of al-Qushayrī who relied on him immensely for much of their perspective and thus also offer us glimpses of how things evolved beyond al-Qushayrī's family's legacy. I have included references to the Qur'anic commentaries of Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī (d. 1137/1725) and Aḥmad b. ʿAjība (d. 1809) especially in the fourth chapter to demonstrate the augmented use of gendered language in Sufism in ways that began with al-Sarrāj but really found footing in al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's work and continued to have a significant impact on constructions of gender in Sufi texts for subsequent centuries. Both Ḥaqqī and Ibn ʿAjība reproduce much of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's Qur'anic commentary, thus representing a continuance of Nishapuri influence as well as its evolution into different time periods and locations.

Taken together, these works of al-Sarrāj, al-Kalabādhi, al-Sulamī, al-Qushayrī, Abū Saʿīd, Hujwīrī, al-Ghazālī, al-Fārisī, ʿAṭṭār, Ibn al-Jawzī, Ḥaqqī and Ibn ʿAjība present a wealth of material which enables us to trace a lineage of ideas about the work and relevance of gender in the narrativization of Sufi history from the formative to the classical period of Islam. These sources center Nishapur in a way that has been previously neglected in academic scholarship and demonstrate the fruitfulness of gender analysis in understanding the nuances of identity formation and the emergence of social movements in specific historical contexts. This diachronic study allows us to develop perspectives on history that,

[115] Karen Ruffle convincingly argues that hagiographical literature has a social and didactic function and thus reflects the local and sociopolitical values of its authors and audience. Ruffle, *Gender, Sainthood, & Everyday Practice in South Asian Shiʿism*, 2–5. While Ruffle explores the role of hagiography in South Asian Shīʿi circles of devotion, her insights apply to a certain extent to Sufi circles of saint veneration.

while inevitably partial, offer some sense of what Sufi authors debated and the consequences of their approach to the historicization of their collective memory.

1.4 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation follows the model of a "nested cosmos,"[116] analyzing how elite masculinity is constructed and reproduced first in broader outward-directed political struggles then in smaller concentric social circles that have embodied and discursive consequences for community members that ultimately resulted in the redrawing of communal boundaries. I highlight four specific ascetic practices as sites for the construction of gender to negotiate power in Nishapur, self-mortification (*zuhd*), wandering without provisions (*siyāḥa*), sexual abstinence/chastity (*ʿuzla/ʿafāf*), and voluntary fasting (*jūʿ, ṣawm*). Through investigating the gendered impacts of changing discourses about these practices, I offer critical tools that illuminate the role of gender, not only in the social construction of the human body, but also urban institutions and narrativizations of history as collective memory. The rest of the dissertation is divided into four chapters that highlight the relevance of discourses of gender and power both to the creation of city spaces and institutions as well as in regulating the bodies of the members of Nishapuri society.

In Chapter two, I investigate the construction of medieval Sufism by addressing Nishapur's elite class structure and the debates around rival forms of asceticism in the fifth/eleventh century. I note how the discourse of *zuhd*, asceticism enacted through bodily

[116] Ayubi, *Gendered Morality*, 176.

performance of austerities, shifted in the fifth/eleventh century as al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī fought to align their Sufism with Malāmati ideals and draw clear boundaries separating them from their non-elite rural Karrāmi rivals. The development of these new boundaries around *zuhd* and the subsequent perpetuation of elite Sufism created an androcentric program of spiritual development that became increasingly dominant in ensuing generations. Through a comparative analysis of discourses of *zuhd* prior to the rise of Nishapur as a center of Sufism as well as during and after the height of Karrāmi influence, I conclude gendered language redirected Sufi practice from asceticism to inner renunciation while also erecting class boundaries around Sufism as a religious movement.

In Chapter three, I explore the impact of the rural/urban divide between the Sufis and Karrāmis on the transformation of Sufism into a tradition practiced indoors by elite male adherents. Since the Karrāmis were rural and non-elite, Nishapuri Sufi interest in urbanizing Sufism carried with it the benefit of eliminating the physical presence of the Karrāmiyya. However, regulating membership of one group often has detrimental effects for other groups who do not hold hegemonic power. Thus, through a case study of the gradual decline of *siyāḥa* (ascetic wandering) as a Sufi practice and Sufi narrativization of social inferiors in metaphorical depictions of the exurban, this chapter investigates the move from unregulated Sufism practiced on the margins of urban society to regulated Sufism practiced within the physical boundaries of dedicated urban Sufi buildings. Following from a broader sociopolitical analysis, this chapter investigates urban space as an arena through which male Sufis mapped gendered ideology onto physical sites of spiritual practice.

Chapters four and five explore how boundaries constructed through gendered urban sacred space were reproduced in corporeal bodies through the regulation of physical behavior. Al-Ghazālī understands all evil as a product of two types of desire (*shahwa*): the excessive desire for sex and the excessive desire for food.[117] Given that these two desires are conflated with the material body in much of medieval spiritual discourse, each one is taken as a central case study in the final two chapters.

Chapter four investigates Sufi discourses of sexual desire and gendered representations of chastity (*ʿuzla, ʿafāf*). Just as Nishapuri scholars gendered political enemies as deficient in masculinity and created physical walls to exclude them, they also constructed and centered masculine subjectivity such that social boundaries were put in place to separate elite men from their social inferiors. This chapter explores the language of chastity as one way in which persistent male subjectivity was established and maintained in medieval Sufi literature.[118] Beginning with an investigation of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's androcentric construction of desire (*shahwa*), this chapter explores the legacy of gendered discourses of *shahwa* through a textual analysis of Ibn al-Jawzī's edition of al-Sulamī's biographical entries on female Sufis.

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[117] Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn*, 3:79-107; Ghazālī, *Curbing the Two Appetites*.

[118] Shaikh describes the "persistent male subjectivity" of Sufi literature as a fundamental obstacle to gender-egalitarian readings of Sufism. Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, 44. In her work on gendered morality, Zahra Ayubi notes how men are constructed as ethical subjects and women as ethical objects in the writings of Muslim philosophers. Chapter Four extends this analysis to realm of Sufism and the cultivation of spiritual virtue. Ayubi, *Gendered Morality*, 24. Saʿdiyya Shaikh and Zahra Ayubi both suggest that Sufi writers, whether they offer gender-egalitarian or highly patriarchal views of ontology and epistemology, also convey disruptions and internal contradictions in their views. Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, 96; Ayubi, *Gendered Morality*, 7–12. With this in mind, the androcentric nature of Sufi source-texts can offer some in-roads to understanding gender and women beyond the most apparent and skewed depictions of the men who write about them.

Finally, in Chapter five, I analyze Sufi discourses of fasting to sketch out the development of gendered textual visibility of the body of social inferiors in Sufi biographical literature. I begin this chapter with implicit mentions of the emaciated female body in al-Sulamī's *Dhikr* and compare that to Ibn al-Jawzī's insertion of more explicit references to emaciated female bodies in his *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa* two centuries later. I also compare depictions of female emaciation with an account from al-Qushayrī's *Risāla* of an emaciated male youth. Through an investigation of ascetic fasting (*jūʿ*, *ṣawm*), I argue that piety became inscribed on female and non-elite male bodies in a way that reinforces feebleness as a characteristic of women and deficiently masculine individuals while prioritizing elite men as thinking subjects. Through using gendered language to differentiate ascetic fasting in male and female Sufis, male authors deepened gender differentiation by conflating men with their mental faculties and women/non-elite individuals with physical embodiment. Such gendered distinctions perpetuated male-dominated homosocial worlds and male subjectivity through casting the same behavior as differing in its effects on variously gendered bodies. This chapter thus demonstrates how gendered language reproduces gendered subjects and inscribes social patriarchy on human bodies.

These five chapters demonstrate the usefulness of gender-sensitive analysis in illuminating the subjective positions of the authors of received historical records. By tracking how gendered discourse is constructed and reproduced, we discern the lasting consequences of gendered discourse in broad circles of practice. Al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's writings are replete with evidence of their subjective political positions. Gender analysis makes clear how these social subjectivities informed subsequent forms of Sufism.

2 *Zuhd*: Gendering Asceticism in Nishapuri Sufism

After weathering centuries of competition from rival ascetic and mystical movements,[1] Sufism became the dominant form of Islamic mysticism and asceticism in the fifth/eleventh century in large part due to the combined efforts of Nishapuri natives and exegetes Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī and Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī.[2] Both took great pains to endorse Sufism through Qur'anic precedents and ḥadīth proof-texts and attempted to record all available knowledge of proto-Sufi doctrine and practice for posterity.[3] Shortly following their tenures as popular local teachers of Islamic sciences as well as mystical doctrine and ascetic practice, the title "Sufi" became the most dominant nomenclature to identify mystically inclined ascetics in medieval Persia.[4] Their Nishapuri brand of Sufism was institutionalized in the following centuries through the establishment of master-disciple lineages and the founding of Sufi lodges (*khānaqāh*, *duwayra*) that are still hallmarks of Sufi orders today. Some scholars such as Jacqueline Chabbi and Martin Nguyen have argued that Sufi lodges were modelled after the *khānaqāhs* of Karrāmis in Nishapur.[5] Despite this potential influence, many Sufis resisted Karrāmis on issues of

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[1] Melchert, "Sufis and Competing Movements in Nishapur." For some preliminary definitions of asceticism and mysticism and where these two strands of religious expression might diverge, see Melchert, "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E."
[2] Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar*, 2–3.
[3] For more on al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's use of ḥadīth and "uṣūlization" to promote Sufism at the center of hegemonic Sunni Islamic discourse, see Nguyen, 57–58. The term uṣūlization was coined by Vincent Cornell and applied by Rkia Cornell to explain how al-Sulamī sought to merge Sufism with Shafiʿī principles of law through the methodology of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Cornell, "Introduction," *Early Sufi Women*, 37-8.
[4] Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, 41.
[5] Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar: Abū'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī and the Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, 67.

doctrine, praxis and socioeconomic status. These orders have traditionally centered free, elite men while marginalizing women and other socially subordinated groups such as enslaved individuals.

While al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī were heavily influenced by their Baghdadi mystic predecessors, as is apparent from the writings of Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988), their brand of Sufism emerged in response to sociopolitical and economic pressures particular to Nishapur such as urban factionalism, patrician family alliances and political persecution by rival ascetics such as the Karrāmis.[6] The Karrāmis were a native Nishapuri ascetic movement that emerged in the 9th century in the rural areas of Khurasan in opposition to the patrician elites. The Shāfiʿī Sufis of Nishapur were heavily Malāmati in leanings, and thus stood in ideological opposition to the Karrāmiyya. Al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī deployed gendered discourse to sideline their political opponents and in the process reconstructed Sufism as an elite masculine endeavor of inner renunciation. They contrasted this inner renunciation with the external bodily performance of ascetic austerities, which both the Karrāmis and the practitioners of formative Sufism had regularly undertaken. In al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's attempts to diminish the positions of their enemies, often through emasculating language, they constructed Sufism as an elite, androcentric pursuit. Their writings centered male Sufi protagonists and subtly positioned women and political opponents as hindrances to true men on the spiritual path.

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[6] Bosworth, "Karrāmiyya." The tension between the ascetic doctrines of both groups will be analyzed below. For some information on the Malāmatiyya in Nishapur and early tensions between the two groups, see: Jong, Algar, and Imber, "Malāmatiyya." Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar*, 62–64. Melchert, "Sufis and Competing Movements in Nishapur."

Al-Qushayrī's particularly aggressive politicized gendering of asceticism resulted in the textual marginalization of female lived experiences of ascetic mysticism despite the fact that externalized performances of asceticism persisted after al-Qushayrī's lifetime. Because al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī liken enemies to women and male adolescents perhaps as a means of diminishing the claims of rival groups like the Karrāmis, the threat of the Karrāmis in Nishapur occupies a critical place in the gendering of Sufism as a hegemonic masculine endeavor. They defined Sufism in contradistinction to the externalized bodily performances of those considered inferior, whether socially or politically. Reading Nishapuri writings with an eye to the relation between gender and politics reveals how the construction of gendered boundaries supported the development of hegemonic Sufism.

2.1.1 The move away from asceticism as a marker of Nishapuri spiritual identity

It is telling that terms like *zāhid* and *nāsik*, terms heavily associated with externalized asceticism, fell out of use in Nishapur after the fifth/eleventh century, while al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's preferred nomenclature "Sufi" became the dominant form of addressing ascetically inclined, mystically engaged male Muslim practitioners.[7] The use of gendered language to disambiguate Sufi asceticism from rival practices necessarily impacted the women of Nishapur, as is clear from al-Sulamī's use of Nishapuri women to criticize externalized asceticism and al-Qushayrī's adamance that male Sufis should avoid both enemies and women as both are cast as barriers to male spiritual success. The success of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's push for inner renunciation under the banner of Sufism can

[7] Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar*, 62–66.

be seen in the emergence of “Sufi” as the dominant marker of pious ascetic identity in Nishapur over the course of three centuries.

Richard Bulliet’s quantitative analysis of hagiographical data from Nishapur displays the shift in identity markers in this period succinctly. Arguing that the Sufis of Nishapur were hard to categorize, Richard Bulliet notes, "...there were always ascetics who eschewed pietism and mysticism, mystics who had no truck with asceticism... ."[8] The medieval historians of Nishapur, including al-Qushayrī’s grandson Abū Bakr al-Fārisī (d. 529/1135), have at times chosen to label the city's adherents of mystical practices "ascetic" (*zāhid*), “pious worshipper” (*ʿābid*) or "*ṣūfī*."[9] Some individuals were associated with more than one of these labels while others were called none of them. Although Bulliet understands Sufism as a movement consisting of three strands: asceticism (*zuhd*), pietism (*ʿibāda*) and what he terms "mystic speculation" (*taṣawwuf*/Sufism), the label ascetic (*zāhid*) chronologically appears with greatest frequency in the fourth/ninth century, with pietist (*ʿābid*) gaining more prominence in the fifth/tenth century until finally the term Sufi becomes the primary marker of mystical piety in the fifth/tenth century during al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī’s lifetime.[10]

Bulliet's quantitative analysis matches up with al-Qushayrī 's account of how Sufism came to be the dominant marker of identity of pious asceticism in Nishapur.

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[8] Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, 42.
[9] Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, 41.
[10] Bulliet, 41.

> As for those who came after [the Prophet's companions], they were called "the successors of the successors" (*atbāʿ al-tābiʿīn*). After that, the people became more and more diverse, and their ranks became distinct from one another. The elect people, who had deep concern for the affairs of faith, came to be known as "ascetics" (*zuhhād*) and "pious worshippers" (*ʿubbād*). Then there appeared innovations and strife among various factions. Each group claimed that the [true] ascetics (*zuhhād*) were among them. As for those elect adherents of the Prophet's custom who kept every breath they made with God and who protected their hearts from the onslaughts of forgetfulness, they were distinguished from the rest by the name "Sufism" (*taṣawwuf*). This name became widely applied to the greatest among them before the second century of the *hijra*.[11]

Based on al-Qushayrī's understanding, the term *zāhid* and *ʿābid* gave way to the title of Sufi because of factionalism, innovation, and competition. In his view, those that truly deserved the term came to be known as the Sufis—[12]although he claims the term was already commonplace two centuries before his lifetime, thus casting his political anxieties and the circumstances of his time backwards into history.[13] Al-Qushayrī 's assessment of the relationship between asceticism and Sufism, while biased towards establishing Sufism in line with Islamic textual sources and Shāfiʿī orthodoxy, gives us insight into the central role al-Qushayrī accorded factionalism in the development of Sufi identity. A significant aspect of Nishapuri urban factionalism that al-Qushayrī glosses over is the role of socioeconomic interests in the development of antagonistic political conflict. He frames the conflict over ascetic practice as a doctrinal one, but a critical analysis of the gendered

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[11] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 21; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 17. Knysh's translation has been altered here for clarity and consistency.

[12] The term "Sufi" is sometimes considered a reference to earlier wool-wearing in ascetic circles, so it is interesting that al-Qushayrī prefers this demarcation despite rejecting wool-wearing as an adequate act of piety. However, in his section on the origin of the term Sufi, al-Qushayrī outright dismisses the origin of the term coming from "wool" and instead posits it comes from the root for "purity" despite the linguistic improbability of this. Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 312; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 288–89. By comparison, al-Sarrāj easily attributes the term to the root meaning of "wool," see Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ*, 30–32.

[13] Herbert Berg argues that exegetical ḥadīths are similarly "projected backwards" in an attempt to conflate historiography with communicative and connective memory—thus establishing authenticity through the "retrieval" of a constructed cultural memory. Berg, "The Isnād and the Production of Cultural Memory," 260, 272.

historiography of Nishapur reveals socioeconomic and political layers to these religious practices of asceticism and renunciation.

This chapter surveys discourses of asceticism prior to, during and after al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's lifetimes in order to trace the formulation of new ascetic doctrines in a time when institutionalized Sufism was beginning to take root. I specifically analyze the role of rival movements in Nishapur in provoking the gendering of asceticism in Sufism. I conclude that the Karrāmi threat incited al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī to differentiate their brand of Sufism, which they chose to do through deploying gender discourse to assert their self-proclaimed identity as Sufis and control the practice of asceticism in Nishapur.

In the first part of this chapter, I survey the discourse on asceticism outside of Nishapur prior to the fifth/eleventh century by analyzing Baghdadi resident Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988) and Iraqi author Abū Bakr al-Kalabādhī's (d. 380/990) elucidations of the meaning and performance of asceticism (*zuhd*) in their early Sufi communities. Al-Sarrāj and al-Kalabādhī both present asceticism as a laudable and foundational part of walking the Sufi path and an essential marker of Sufi identity. I then compare these fourth/tenth-century accounts of asceticism to the writings of al-Sulamī and his student al-Qushayrī in the fifth/eleventh century. This comparative analysis reveals the political and social anxieties that informed the Nishapuri rejection of externalized asceticism and the construction of masculinized ideals of inner renunciation. Narratives that emasculate enemies and conflate them with women provide glimpses of how al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī used gender to political ends. Finally, I juxtapose fifth/eleventh-century Sufi asceticism with historical records authored by al-Qushayrī's grandson Abū Bakr al-Fārisī

(d. 529/1135) in the sixth/twelfth century to reveal that al-Qushayrī's attempts to diminish externalized asceticism failed even while the gendered discourse he propagated survived. Al-Fārisī's records of ascetic women in Nishapur two generations after al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī demonstrate how anti-Karrāmi sentiments impacted later expressions of Sufi asceticism long after the Karrāmis lost influence in Nishapur. Together, the three sections of this chapter covering three centuries of Sufi writings prior to, during and after the rise of the Karrāmi threat in Nishapur demonstrate the lasting impact of Nishapuri urban factionalism on the gendering of Sufi discourse. In responding to rivals Karrāmis, al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī transformed Sufism from a variegated movement practiced on the margins of Islamicate societies to an elite, androcentric program seeking a place at the center of hegemonic Sunni Islamic discourse.

2.2 Before Nishapur: Asceticism in the fourth/tenth century

Prior to the emergence of the Karrāmi threat in Nishapur there were many diverging, opposing and intersecting strands of mystical and ascetic practice. [14] Most proto-Sufis were at the time practitioners of various bodily performances of asceticism (*zuhd* or *nusk*) including extreme renunciation of food and material goods, dwelling in caves and wandering arid landscapes without provisions (*siyāḥa*).[15] The name "Sufi" had yet to gain any real traction and thus mystical and ascetic practitioners were known by terms such as

[14] For information on some competing ascetic and mystical groups in 9th-11th century Persianate cultures, see Melchert, "Sufis and Competing Movements in Nishapur." Also see Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 1–2.
[15] Salamah-Qudsi, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety*, 2018, xiii.

ʿ*ābid* (devotee), *nāsik* (renunciant) or *zāhid* (ascetic).[16] A number of these wandering, self-mortifying individuals donned coarse wool as a marker of their ascetic inclinations, but this by no means indicated affiliation to a distinguishable and coherent group identity.[17] The practices of these early ascetics seem to have ranged widely from supplementary rituals of fasting, prayer and begging for alms to excessive mortification of the body through starvation, wearing coarse cloth that chafed the skin, and even suspending the body upside down.[18] As Sara Sviri notes, criticism of excessive shows of austerity became commonplace in later Sufi manuals—[19] but many early Sufi stories valorized externalized asceticism as symbols of piety.[20] Fourth/tenth century author Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj championed those who wore wool as heirs of prophetic custom[21] and his contemporary Abū Bakr al-Kalabādhī (d. 380/990) glorified tales of those who refused to sleep, spending their nights in prayer as a form of self-punishment.[22] Writing a century prior to al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī, these early Sufi authors portray the bodily performance of asceticism as a praiseworthy spiritual goal.

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[16] Sviri, "Sufism," 15-18
[17] Salamah-Qudsi, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety*, 2018, ix. While Salamah-Qudsi problematizes the scholarly notion that formative Sufism was characteristically individual until later Sufism developed as a communal identity, she agrees that the writings of the fourth/tenth century set up the conditions for the rise of Sufi collective identity, which formerly lacked cohesion. Salamah-Qudsi, 14.
[18] Gobillot, "Zuhd."
[19] Sviri, "Sufism," 15. For an overview of typical Sunni resistance to asceticism in general and discussion of why early ascetic forms of Sufism may have developed, see Knysh, *Sufism*, 17–31.
[20] Melchert, "The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E.," 54–55.
[21] Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ*, 21.
[22] Kalābādhī, *The Doctrine of the Ṣūfīs*, 115.

Al-Sarrāj travelled widely recording the teachings of mystics and ascetics across Persia, Iraq, Syria and Egypt and thus cites a number of authorities on the centrality of asceticism in attaining spiritual ends.[23] In al-Sarrāj's descriptions of the practices and teachings of spiritual masters, he describes asceticism as the source of all that is good.[24] He begins his section on asceticism (*zuhd*) in *al-Lumaʿ fī al-taṣawwuf* (Glimmers in Sufism) writing,

> Asceticism is a noble station and it is the foundation of pleasing (spiritual) states and magnificent ranks. It is the first step for those who seek to reach God, exalted, those who separate themselves from anything other than God, those who are pleased with God and who place their trust in God. So whoever does not establish his foundation in asceticism, nothing will be right for him after that, because the love of the world (*dunyā*) is the source of every error while asceticism in the world is the source of every good thing and obedience to God.
>
> It is said that whoever is called by the names of asceticism in this world, upon him will be conferred a thousand names of praise. And whoever is called by the names of desire (*raghba*)[25] in the world, he will be conferred a thousand blameworthy names.[26]

Al-Sarrāj's emphasis of the primary place of asceticism in the spiritual journey of a Sufi aspirant indicates that asceticism was a key aspect of Sufi spirituality prior to fifth/eleventh-century Nishapur. In his writings, al-Sarrāj privileges the teachings of Baghdadi natives like Sarī al-Saqatī (d. 253/867), Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 298/910) and Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/945), whose discourses on asceticism reflect a general

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[23] Lory, "Al-Sarrādj."
[24] Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ*, 46.
[25] While al-Sarrāj uses the word *raghba* to indicate worldly desire, al-Qushayrī later weaves together a larger discourse on resisting worldly desire using the term "*shahwa*" instead, using *raghba* to designate spiritual desire. Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 235–39; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 213–17. The different ways Sufi authors portray desire will be discussed further in Chapter four of this dissertation.
[26] Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ*, 46.

hostility towards earthly possessions as well as a desire to free the heart of material obsessions.[27]

While praising ascetic inclinations overall, al-Sarrāj takes care to criticize those who undertake severe austerities without the supervision of an adept guide.[28] He seems eager to ensure that certain austerities are undertaken in appropriate ways and under reliable guidance so that no spiritual harm results from novice attempts at excessively austere ascetic practices.[29] Al-Sarrāj's criticisms of novices lay the foundation for al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's own hostilities towards externalized ascetic performances, but appear in al-Sarrāj's writings as potential pitfalls for those who undertake austerity without the support of an experienced ascetic. Despite his warnings to inexperienced ascetics, Al-Sarrāj understands asceticism as foundational to Sufism and a prerequisite to progression on the spiritual path.[30]

In contrast to al-Sarrāj's generalized extolling of asceticism, Abū Bakr al-Kalabādhī describes Sufis in his *Kitāb al-taʿarruf li-madhāhib ahl al-taṣawwuf* (The Book of Knowledge of the Schools of the Sufi Folk) by specific physical markers of austerity and outwardly ascetic behaviors such as wearing wool, withdrawing from society and resisting bodily desires.

> [The Sufis], they were people who had left this world, departed from their home, fled from their companions. They wandered about the land, mortifying the carnal desires, and making naked the body: they took of this world's goods only so much as is indispensable for

[27] Sarrāj, 46–47.
[28] Sarrāj, 417.
[29] Sarrāj, 417.
[30] Sarrāj, 46.

> covering their nakedness and allaying hunger. …The Syrians called them "Starvers," because they only took as much food as would keep up their strength in times of necessity. … Because they were devoid of possessions, they were called "paupers." …Because of their clothes and manner of dressing they were called Ṣūfī: for they did not put on raiment soft to touch or beautiful to behold, to give delight to the soul, they only clothed themselves in order to hide their nakedness, contenting themselves with rough haircloth and coarse wool.[31]

In this passage, al-Kalabādhī's description of the clothing and exercises of ascetics highlights the performative aspects of early Sufi asceticism. While al-Sarrāj avoids such external markers of asceticism in his discussion, both assert the central role of asceticism in the spirituality of Sufis. In comparing al-Sarrāj and al-Kalabādhī's accounts of asceticism in the century prior to the lives of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī, we notice an overall preoccupation with the avoidance of material goods—a practice heavily promoted by the Karrāmis of Nishapur around the same time under the doctrine of *taḥrīm al-makāsib* (prohibition of profit).[32] When al-Sarrāj discusses bodily mortification and excessive fasting, he insists that such activities alone do not bring any spiritual attainment but can, under the guidance of a master, assist one's journey to God.[33] Al-Kalabādhī sees bodily

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[31] Kalābādhī, *The Doctrine of the Ṣūfīs*, 4–5. Here, al-Kalābādhī understands the title "Sufi" as a reference to *ṣūf* or "wool" in Arabic. Al-Qushayrī later dismisses this etymology as implausible given the proliferation of wool-wearing individuals, insisting that it is not "wool" but rather "purity" (*ṣafāʾ*) that gave the Sufis their name. Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 312; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 288–89. In my view, each author's account of the original etymology of the word *ṣūfī* reveals the extent of acceptance of or resistance to bodily performances of externalized asceticism.

[32] Salamah-Qudsi, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety*, 2018, 29–30. As Salamah-Qudsi notes, the Karrāmis and the Sufis held similar practices particularly with regards to voluntary poverty. While Salamah-Qudsi attributes Karrāmi influence to Sufi practices, she does not investigate how the Karrāmi controversy in Nishapur impacted Sufi doctrine and practice—attributing the debate over externalized and internalized piety and asceticism to a clash between Malāmati and Baghdadi mysticisms. Salamah-Qudsi also argues that asceticism was encouraged in the early phases of a Sufi's young life, while elder Sufis were later given license to enjoy earthly luxuries given their spiritual accomplishments. In contrast, I argue that there was a significant shift in attitude towards externalized asceticism with a lot of resistance developing because of the Karrāmi presence in Nishapur and the influence of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī on ensuing Sufi spiritualities. This resistance to externalized asceticism did not necessarily eliminate austere ascetic practices from Sufism but transformed the discourse and language of piety in a highly gendered way.

[33] Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ*, 417.

mortification, ascetic acts of hunger and avoidance of material possession as important markers of Sufi spiritual identity. Both praise asceticism as central to Sufi comportment, placing material desire in opposition to pious asceticism.

2.2.1 Gendering asceticism in early Sufi writings

The base, material desires al-Sarrāj and al-Kalabādhī present as the site of ascetic resistance are symbolically gendered feminine in many Sufi writings. Sufi writers regularly employ gendered language to explain and elucidate the mechanisms of asceticism on the spiritual path.[34] While both early and later Sufi authors utilize gendered tropes, the use of these tropes shifts over time and develops into broader and more cohesive gendered ideologies. A common *topos* and one of the most gender-charged discourses in Sufi writing is the depiction of the *dunyā* or the material world as a woman to be despised and discarded by those seeking to cultivate ascetic virtues and a meaningful spiritual life.[35] While the term *dunyā* is linguistically gendered feminine in Arabic and appears in the Qur'an as such, some male Sufi writers symbolically anthropomorphize the *dunyā* a woman in their discourse, with some Sufi men extending the analogy to social directives that limit male

[34] Sufism is not unique in associating women with the material, non-spiritual realm as Christian traditions have long gendered earthly life as feminine and spiritual life as masculine. See Ewing, "Women as 'the Devil's Gateway,'" 79. Also Noddings, *Women and Evil*, 18. For gendered representations of evil in non-Christian traditions see: Chakraborty, "Women, Serpent and Devil." Just as Tertullian wrote of women that they are "the devil's gateway," so too did Ottoman Qur'anic exegete Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī (d. 1137/1725) write that women are the "ropes of Satan." See Church, "Sex and Salvation in Tertullian." Ḥaqqī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ al-Bayān*, Q3:14. There are many parallels between Sufi gendered ideology and Christian conceptions of women as earthly temptations that knowingly or unknowingly cause hindrances to the male spiritual path while still acknowledging in a limited way women's potential for piety. For a discussion of Qur'anic and extra-Qur'anic parallels to Biblical conceptions of Eve as a model of women's deficiency and role as temptress, see Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*, 25–38.

[35] Schimmel, *My Soul is a Woman*, 1997, 69-74.

Sufis' interaction with women and promote male self-restraint.[36] While al-Sarrāj offers little space to negotiating the place of women in Sufi circles of practice (something al-Qushayrī seemed particularly concerned about in his own writings a century later), al-Sarrāj participates in symbolically gendering asceticism masculine and thus sets the foundation for al-Qushayrī's ideological moves. Consequently, both authors cast men as the default spiritual subjects in contrast to women who function as symbolic parallels to the material world.

A particularly graphic example of Sufi gendering of the material world appears at the end of the chapter on asceticism in al-Sarrāj's *Lumaʿ*, which is reproduced in al-Qushayrī's *al-Risāla fī ʿilm al-taṣawwuf* (The Epistle on Sufism). The comment is attributed to Yaḥya b. Muʿādh (d. 257/871), an early Nishapuri ascetic who understood asceticism as the practice of three things: poverty, self-seclusion and hunger (three examples of the bodily performance of asceticism).[37] Yaḥya b. Muʿādh describes the material world as an unveiled bride whom an ascetic must renounce through violent means. This passage juxtaposes three groups in hierarchy: 1) the "cosmeticians" (*māshiṭ*) who indulge in and tend to their material pleasures, 2) the ascetics who actively resist material desires, and 3) the gnostics who neglect to show the world any interest whatsoever.

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[36] Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 3, 52, 66, 73, 313, 388, 415.

[37] Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, 101. Interestingly, the highly gendered passage that both al-Sarrāj and al-Qushayrī quote on behalf of Yaḥya b. Muʿādh is not reproduced in al-Sulamī's biographical entry on the man—despite al-Sulamī's inclusion of several aphorisms on asceticism narrated from Yaḥya b. Muʿādh. This indicates al-Sulamī was very selective in his writings, preferring to avoid this particular conflation of women with materiality. Of course, this does not preclude his use of patriarchal gender discourse in other parts of his work.

> Yaḥya b. Muʿadh said: "This world is like an unveiled bride. The one who seeks her becomes her cosmetician, while the one who renounces her blackens[38] her face, tears out her hair, rends her dress. As for the gnostic, he is preoccupied with God alone and pays no attention to her."[39]

Here, al-Sarrāj uses Yaḥya b. Muʿādh to promote the ascetic ideal through the symbol of enacting violence upon a feminized body as a way of overpowering one's lower order desires. The use of gender as a language to negotiate spiritual power and self-mastery, while present in al-Sarrāj's writings and to some extent in al-Sulamī's, finds fuller expression in al-Qushayrī's work. Al-Qushayrī employs gendered language throughout his writing and repeatedly re-enacts the ascetic masculine's triumph over a feminized earthly body as a Sufi ideal.

Al-Kalabādhī similarly participates in gendering asceticism as a male endeavor through subtle constructions of men as spiritual subjects and women as aspects of earthly life. In a section describing the state of Sufis who have passed beyond the world of multiplicity and therefore see no difference amongst physical entities, al-Kalabādhī cites ʿĀmir b. ʿAbd Allāh saying, "I do not care whether I [see] a woman or a wall."[40] When al-Kalabādhī equates women with walls, he suggests that truly accomplished male Sufis, in essence, can transcend desire for women and learn to look upon a woman as a mundane and uninteresting everyday object like a wall offering no reason for arousal. Because al-

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[38] In the original Arabic, the phrase used is *al-zāhidu fīhā* indicating the ascetic *(zāhid*) is one who violently rejects the *dunya* (material world). The racialized aspect of this violence enacted on the body of the world is a significant aspect of gendering Sufism for elite men and represents the racial and economic dimensions of gendered discourse in Sufi writings. A discussion of al-Qushayrī's use of blackness to demarcate lesser spiritual states appears in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

[39] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 155; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 137. Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ*, 47.

[40] Kalābādhī, *The Doctrine of the Ṣūfīs*, 120. Al-Qushayrī's appropriation of this teaching appears in Chapter Four of this dissertation as an illustration of how al-Qushayrī took up earlier Sufi teachings and further gendered them to support male ascetic endeavors.

Kalabādhī quotes this passage in a section of his *Taʿarruf* that discusses passing beyond oneself, women are presented here in congruity with the physical world rather than as spiritual subjects in their own right. When al-Qushayrī quotes this passage, he attributes it to Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭamī instead and foregrounds the desexualizing of the female body in ways al-Kalabādhī avoids. Rather than presenting this story in the same context as al-Kalabādhī to model male ascetics passing beyond the world of multiplicity, Al-Qushayrī contextualizes this teaching in a story in which al-Bisṭamī boasts that God protected him from the desire for women as well as the desire for food.[41] Thus, while al-Kalabādhī presents women as congruent with other physical objects of the material world (thus modelling a passive disinterest in women), al-Qushayrī presents women as sites of active resistance to desire for earthly things (thus modelling sustained opposition to women).

Through anthropomorphizing the material world as a woman on one hand and enmeshing women with the material world on the other, both al-Sarrāj and al-Kalabādhī center the male experience of the world as the site of ascetic practice such that later Sufis could construct gradually more gendered Sufi systems of piety. These early gendered remarks set the foundation for the elucidation of gendered Sufism that dominates Nishapuri writings, particularly through al-Qushayrī's repurposing of these remarks in ways that further privilege male spiritual experiences in an attempt to construct a new Sufi asceticism against rival Karrāmi claims.

[41] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 38; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 32.

2.3 Ideological wars in fifth/eleventh-century Nishapur

A historical investigation of rival mystic and ascetic movements in medieval Nishapur unearths the aspects of anti-Karrāmi polemic that most influenced al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī to take earlier gendered Sufi remarks and develop a systematically gendered Sufi asceticism. Their construction of Nishapuri Sufism as an enactment of resistance to externalized asceticism gave them the opportunity to organize earlier ideas into coherent systems of beliefs and doctrine. Their resistance to externalized asceticism was built on antipathy towards the Karrāmis who, in al-Sulamī's lifetime, had become a threat to the Nishapuri social and religious establishment. Because Nishapur consisted of an urban patrician elite that controlled both economic prosperity and socioreligious discourse, the rise of antiestablishment movements such as the Karrāmis provoked the ire of elite scholars such as al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī, who attempted to preserve hegemonic Nishapuri social systems in a time when political power was often changing hands.[42]

By diminishing the bodily performance of asceticism and championing a new practice of inner renunciation using gender as a mediating tool, al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī privileged the elite masculine in Sufi thought and praxis in their attempts to resist Karrāmi discourse. The new Sufi brand of renunciation that al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī promoted in response to the Karrāmis sought to reorient ascetic practice away from austere performances of bodily mortification such as excessive poverty, celibacy, exposure to the elements, extended fasting and prayer—practices that had proliferated amongst many

[42] Malamud, "The Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan," 38.

groups prior to the rise of the Karrāmi threat—and towards an inner detachment from worldly pleasure. The ways in which al-Qushayrī in particular constructed this new inner asceticism heavily employed gendered metaphors to assert the (male) Sufi's dominance and victory over his (feminized) lower order desires, enemies and the material world.

Contrary to popular images of Sufis as poor, self-denying desert wanderers, the Sufis of Nishapur were privileged members of the upper echelons of society. They benefitted immensely from a patrician class system that was unique to Nishapur. The Nishapuri patrician structure favored a few key families who controlled religious discourse through large kinship networks connecting prominent ḥadīth scholars. Many utilized marriages with women from influential families as social currency—including al-Qushayrī who married a prominent female scholar of the Daqqāq lineage and inherited her father's *madrasa* (school).[43]

Prior to the rise of the patrician elite, Nishapur began as an unassuming town known for its proximity to a significant Zoroastrian temple in the nearby Rewand hills. It was the site of much resistance to the Arab conquests of the first/seventh century.[44] It remained of secondary importance until the Tahirids conquered it in the early second/eighth century, after which it became a prominent agricultural, political and intellectual center. The outlying farmlands came together to form the city and the rural families who once tilled the soil of the plains became the wealthy upper class of this now influential administrative

[43] Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, 149–53.
[44] *q.v.* "Nishapur," *Encyclopedia Iranica*.

center of Khurasan.[45] Agricultural production supported the whole of Nishapuri society, poor and rich alike, and so the income from these agricultural estates gave the farming families of Nishapur wealth and influence, allowing them to proffer religious endowments that maintained and cultivated the very institutions that made Nishapur a central site of religious, political and cultural activity in the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh century.[46] The development of the patrician classes allowed for the elite members of Nishapur to administer and direct religious education as well as social and intellectual networks mediated through women's kinship networks. The elite impacted religious doctrine and practice through control of intellectual discourse and the dissemination of certain texts and ideas through public sessions (*majlis*, pl. *majalis*). This patrician kinship system aided Nishapuri Sufis as their gathering places (*khānaqāhs, duwayras*) and teacher-student networks relied on patrician connections and endowments. Thus, it was members of the elite classes of religious scholars that established Sufism as a concrete movement with institutional centers in Nishapur.

The patricians of Nishapuri society had such social and political power that those preoccupied in ongoing battles over political leadership continually sought to curry favor with the patricians of Nishapur to cement their hold on the local population. The Sāmānids (204-395/819-1005), Ghaznavids (367-583/978-1187), and Saljuqs (428-707/1037-1307) ruled over Nishapur each for a period of about a century and sought the support of representatives from specific theological schools represented by these patriciate elites to

[45] Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, 11.
[46] Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, 3-19.

support their political power while keeping the local socioeconomic system in working order.[47] Depending on the leanings of the leader, various patrician groups would come into conflict with another and endure state and civil persecution. Saljuq leader Ṭughril Beg (d. 455/1063) supported the exile and imprisonment of a number of Ashʿarī Sufi scholars including al-Qushayrī.[48] Similarly, due to the sponsorship of various political leaders, the Ḥanafīs and Shāfiʿīs endured long periods of civil strife in Nishapur. The Ḥanafīs and Shāfiʿīs, ever at odds, banded together once the Karrāmis instigated socioeconomic schisms by garnering the support of many rural, impoverished Nishapuris seeking to resist the established ruling patrician classes.[49] The rise of the Karrāmi threat in Nishapur, representing the interests of the poor and challenging political and religious hegemonic structures made up of the Arab intellectual elite,[50] created conflict in the region and became a major cause in the politicization of asceticism as an identity marker in the midst of an environment of heavy competition and factionalism. How one defined and practiced asceticism made it abundantly clear which group one identified with in Nishapur, and asceticism quickly became the language of polemic, particularly for Ashʿarī-Shāfiʿī Sufis like al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī.

2.3.1 Externalized asceticism in the Karrāmiyya movement

The Karrāmiyya were a movement founded by Nishapuri local Abū ʿAbd Allāh b. Karrām (d. 255/889)—an advocate of austerity, voluntary poverty and aggressive

[47] Malamud, "The Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan," 45.
[48] Malamud, 45–48. Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar*, 41.
[49] Bosworth, "Rise of the Karāmiyyah in Khurasan," 6.
[50] Bosworth, 6.

proselytization.[51] Though born in Sistan, Ibn Karrām spent a portion of his life in Nishapur before being imprisoned by the Tahirid governor Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir b. ʿAbd Allāh (d. 259/873).[52] After being released, he spent the rest of his life in Jerusalem. Ibn Karrām espoused a philosophy of asceticism that included a strong practice of avoiding generating profit (*taḥrīm al-makāsib*). He established a great following in the rural regions of Khurasan in areas adjacent to the Nishapuri urban center and posed a great threat to the Shāfiʿī and Ḥanafī hegemonic structure at the time. Two centuries after the founding of the Karrāmiyya, a Karrāmi notable by the name of Abū Bakr Maḥmashādh (d. 421/1030) gained political prominence through taking over the *riyāsa*, a previously non-denominational government office, and using it to persecute non-Karrāmis such as the Ashʿarī-Shāfiʿī Sufis of Nishapur. [53] Given the fast growth of Karrāmi support and their anti-establishment stance, the Shāfiʿīs and Ḥanafīs of Nishapur collaborated against the Karrāmis, deeming them a common enemy despite their own antipathy towards each other.[54] As notable members of the Ashʿarī-Shāfiʿī scholarly network, al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī disparaged the Karrāmis in a variety of ways, including disavowing their ascetic practices. The undertones of Karrāmi antipathy in al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's writings and their use of gendered discourse to draw boundaries around their Sufi identities illustrates the enmeshment of gender and politics in Sufi discourse.

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[51] Bosworth, 8.
[52] Bosworth, "Karrāmiyya."
[53] Malamud, "The Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan," 46.
[54] Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, 39.

2.3.2 Malāmati influence in al-Sulamī's critiques of Karrāmi externalized asceticism

Al-Sulamī strongly opposed Karrāmi religious tenets. As an adherent to Malāmati ideals founded upon attracting the ire of others to cultivate sincerity towards God, he disapproved of the Karrāmiyya for their ostentatious show of asceticism.[55] As the main tenets of Malāmati doctrine involved the avoidance of appearing pious, concealing one's poverty, and wearing clothes indistinguishable from laypeople,[56] Karrāmi poverty, austerity and wool-wearing was fundamentally at odds with Malāmati dicta. Well-known for their white cylindrical hats and sheepskin clothing—the Karrāmiyya tended to be, according to their opponents anyway, preoccupied with outwardly displaying their piety.[57] In al-Sulamī's *Uṣūl al-malāmatiyya wa ghalaṭāt al-ṣūfiyya*, he criticizes a number of ascetic practices.[58] Despite much of the material in the *Uṣūl* being traceable back to al-Sarrāj's final chapter in the *Lumaʿ*,[59] al-Sulamī seems to have taught this material to his students and edited al-Sarrāj's words where he felt necessary.[60]

It is telling that three of the charges al-Sulamī holds against mystics and ascetics in his time are: 1) self-mortification (*taqashshuf*), 2) avoidance of generating wealth (which

[55] Melchert, "Sufis and Competing Movements in Nishapur," 238.
[56] Jong, Algar, and Imber, "Malāmatiyya."
[57] Malamud, "The Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan," 41.
[58] Jawwad Anwar Qureshi, "Kitab Al-Aghalit of Sulami: A Study of This Work with Arabic Text Attached"; Sulamī, *Majmūʻah-ʾi āṯār-i Abū ʻAbd al-Raḥmān Sulamī*, 1990, 469–81.
[59] Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ*, 409–34.
[60] For debates regarding true authorship of al-Sulamī's *Uṣūl*, see Arberry, "Did Sulamī Plagiarize Sarrāj?" and Jawwad Anwar Qureshi, "Kitab Al-Aghalit of Sulami: A Study of This Work with Arabic Text Attached," 13–17.

he terms *tark al-kasb*), and 3) the wearing of wool as an outward sign of piety.[61] Al-Sulamī's use of terminology associated with Karrāmi polemics, particularly *tark al-kasb/taḥrīm al-makāsib* and *taqashshuf*,[62] makes his intentions to denounce the practices of the Karrāmis clear. Additionally, al-Sulamī witnessed in his lifetime the draconian tenure of Karrāmi official Abū Bakr Maḥmashādh in the *riyāsa* of Nishapur, a coveted position previously held by a members of a family that largely avoided factional leanings.[63] Abū Bakr Maḥmashādh's allegiance to the Karrāmiyya fueled intense persecution of local Nishapuri leaders, exacerbating anti-Karrāmi sentiment amongst Nishapuri locals.[64] Anti-Karrāmism thus became a hallmark of elite Nishapuri discourse and shaped Sufi approaches to asceticism, particularly in the work of al-Sulamī and the writings of his student al-Qushayrī.

As a rival ascetic group, the Karrāmiyya provoked al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī to delineate clear boundaries of identity and practice in consolidating Sufism. Christina Wieland argues that traumatic social or political experiences that threaten the safety of an established social container[65] often provoke the creation of new, more rigid group identities

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[61] Jawwad Anwar Qureshi, "Kitab Al-Aghalit of Sulami: A Study of This Work with Arabic Text Attached," 52.
[62] Malamud, "The Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan," 43.
[63] Malamud, 43.
[64] Malamud, 46.
[65] Wieland makes use of W.R. Bion's notion of container/contained to explain the sociopolitical replication in the human mind of a safe regulatory relationship such as that of mother/baby wherein the mother digests and process the fears of the baby. When social containers fail to regulate the fears of individuals due to political instability, Wieland argues such trauma causes individuals to seek to create new, usually more rigid containers, manifesting as new group identities, through which to process their fears. Wieland, "The Primitive Container of Fascism," 130–31.

that are more resistant to change and less tolerant of diverse expressions of identity.[66] Fear and anxieties of annihilation, Wieland continues, may cause men in power to reconstitute a new container in which to establish identity and safety that is markedly exclusionary in its membership. The perceived loss of masculinity resulting from the destruction of the old collective and seeking protection in a new identity can provoke heavy masculinization, dramatic exclusions of the other, and the feminization of enemies as a way to reinforce manhood and masculinity.[67] The Karrāmi threat in a historical moment already rife with civil conflict impacted al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's reformulation of Sufism and may have inspired him to employ more heavily gendered, highly masculinized containers of Sufi identity. Such rigidly masculine Sufi ideologies establish exclusively male Sufi spaces of practice. Reconstructing asceticism as an inner pursuit attainable only by true men of God (*rijāl allāh*) consequently impacted women's participation in ascetic practices and theological discussions.

Opponents of the Karrāmiyya often associated Karrāmis with extreme practices of self-mortification, poverty and externalized markers of asceticism such as the donning of coarse woolen garments.[68] Thus, Sufi authors took great care to differentiate their own brand of poverty and asceticism from those of the Karrāmis, despite Sufis participating in congruent practices—as is clear from the writings of al-Sarrāj and al-Kalabādhī discussed

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[66] Wieland, "The Primitive Container of Fascism," 136.
[67] Wieland, 141, 144. While Wieland focuses on rigid masculinized identities in fascist movements, Suzanne Desan indicates similar conclusions have been drawn in analyses of gender during the French Revolution, offering a different political perspective on the masculinization of social identities during instances of political change. Desan, "Recent Historiography on the French Revolution and Gender," 569.
[68] Malamud, "The Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan," 43.

above. Al-Qushayrī differentiated Sufi asceticism from Karrāmi practices by gendering ascetic discipline as a masculine spiritual practice set against the obstacles presented by the lower order earthly realm, gendered female. Nishapuri Sufis cast Sufi asceticism as a renunciation of attachments in one's heart to distinguish it from the wearing of wool and avoidance of profit associated with the Karrāmis. Al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī specifically criticize the forms of externalized asceticism associated with their Karrāmi enemies.

2.3.3 Al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's use of gender in response to the Karrāmiyya

Al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī used women to denounce excessive pursuits of poverty, and particularly self-mortification. Al-Sulamī's antipathy to the Karrāmis influenced his presentation of asceticism in all his writings—but particularly in his depiction of Nishapuri women.[69] When the entries of al-Sulamī's *Dhikr al-niswa* are studied geographically, interesting glimpses into localized expressions of Sufi practice emerge. According to these entries, women in Basra were known for their ascetic weeping and discourses on divine love,[70] the Syrians practiced bodily self-mortification and maintained extensive networks of female teachers and students,[71] and the Nishapuris promoted sincerity and donations of wealth in line with Malāmati ideals.[72]

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[69] Al-Sulamī attributes positive teachings on asceticism to many prominent male figures of his *Ṭabaqāt* including Shaqīq al-Balkhī, Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī and Yaḥyā b. Muʿādh. See Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, 60, 65, 67, 78, 100, 101.
[70] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 96, 98, 106. Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014, 32–35. Cornell, *Rabi'a from Narrative to Myth: The Many Faces of Islam's Most Famous Woman Saint, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*, 129–36.
[71] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 124, 138, 174, 204.
[72] Sulamī, 198, 226, 142. On women donating money to support Sufis, see Salamah-Qudsi, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety*, 2018, 68–71.

Al-Sulamī names as many ascetic women in Nishapur as in Syria and Basra, identifying them by the term *zāhida* (meaning "female ascetic").[73] However, he also endeavors to present Nishapuri women as particularly wary of asceticism. In two instances, al-Sulamī records a Nishapuri woman denouncing ascetics (*zāhid*) as inferior to gnostics (*ʿārif*), echoing the hierarchy Yaḥya b. Muʿādh presents in the "Unveiled Bride" passage:

> ʿAmra was asked: "Is the way of the gnostic in harmony with the way of the ascetic?" She replied: "If the one who is alive is in harmony with the one who is dead, then the gnostic is in harmony with the ascetic!"[74]
>
> I heard ʿAzīza say: "The ascetic seeks out the King for his needs, but the King seeks out the gnostic for His companionship."[75]

For these two Nishapuri women, asceticism is lifeless in comparison to the pursuit of gnosis (*maʿrifa*). It denotes a relationship to God (the King) based on need rather than companionship and is therefore less worthy of a Sufi's effort. By contrast, al-Sulamī applauds the virtues of the female ascetics of Basra, Damaghan and Syria.[76] In al-Sulamī's entry on Unaysa bt. ʿAmr al-ʿAdawiyya in the *Dhikr al-niswa*, he writes, "She used to say: "Of all the things I have compelled my spirit to practice, it has most resisted hunger and poverty."[77] Here, Unaysa highlights the difficulty of practicing hunger and poverty in a way that valorizes these two practices as worthy behaviors to undertake. In the same entry,

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[73] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 184–85, 220–21.
[74] Sulamī, 190.
[75] Sulamī, 242–43.
[76] Sulamī, 88–89, 90–91, 102–3, 116–17, 122–23, 124–25, 192–93.
[77] Sulamī, 102–3. I modified Cornell's translation here for readability. Arabic often employs the use of double negatives for the purpose of emphasis, which often produces translations into English that are difficult to understand. Here I have eliminated the double negatives in the Arabic and provided a more straightforward translation.

al-Sulamī narrates on behalf of his grandfather Ismāʿīl b. Nujayd[78] that Unaysa was the student of a famous Basran ascetic known for excessive fasting and prayer by the name of Muʿādha al-ʿAdawiyya.[79] For a Basran woman like Unaysa, trained by a famed ascetic, to promote starvation and poverty stands in stark contrast to al-Sulamī's own advice against excessive ascetic fasting and avoiding profit, which appears in the treatise he abridged from al-Sarrāj's work as well as in parts of his Qur'anic commentary *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr*. For example, explaining verse 5:87, which reads, "You who believe, do not forbid the good things God has made lawful to you…," al-Sulamī advises, "Do not forbid yourselves profit."[80] The women of Nishapur in al-Sulamī's *dhikr* seem to share an aversion to ascetic identity, indicating Nishapuri women, like al-Sulamī, shared an allegiance to Malāmatism over austere asceticism.

The excessive asceticism in the entries of Basran female mystics does not find many parallels in al-Sulamī's biographical notices of Nishapuri women. In one exception, he describes a woman by the name of ʿAwna al-Naysābūriyya as an extreme, emaciated ascetic (*ṣafīqa wa kathīratu al-mujāhidāt*).[81] Al-Sulamī describes no one else in this way. Interestingly, he records only one other detail about ʿAwna—that she actively sought penance for her ascetic rituals, particularly her excessive prayer and fasting, saying, "I

[78] Ibn Nujayd was a major proponent of women's participation in ascetic and mystical circles. His wife, Fakhrawayh, was a prominent mystic and both actively participated in the training of female ascetics in Nishapuri Sufi circles. Sulamī, 176–77.
[79] Sulamī, 88–89. Muʿādha al-ʿAdawiyya was one of the Successors, the generation following the immediate contemporaries of Muḥammad. See Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam*, 101–3.
[80] Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, Q:5:87.
[81] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 220–21.

repent my prayers and my fasting as the fornicator repents his fornication and the thief repents his theft."[82] Without further explanation as to why she felt her performance of these rituals required penance, the analogy drawn between her rituals of prayer and fasting and the sinful acts of theft and fornication establishes an image of her pious asceticism as somehow insincere or imperfect. Whether we consider al-Sulamī an honest recounter of these women's words or a selective editor of materials attributed to them, repeated disparaging of ascetic endeavors indicates some level of Nishapuri resistance to asceticism as a marker of spiritual identity in al-Sulamī's community of Sufis—and this resistance finds expression in the entries of female ascetics from Nishapur rather than those of the male ascetics of al-Sulamī's *Ṭabaqāt*. Malāmatism was widespread in urban Nishapur. Perhaps the women of Nishapur had internalized the values of Malāmatism while male Sufis were more exposed to other modes of spiritual practice. Al-Sulamī denounces forms of asceticism that involve austere physical practices such as the wearing of wool and self-emaciation as well as the practice of avoiding profit out of an excessive pursuit of poverty—and he expresses this anti-Karrāmi sentiment through the words of Sufi women.

Al-Qushayrī takes up the practice of avoiding profit as a particularly contentious subject in his chapter on asceticism in the *Risāla*. When al-Qushayrī's discussion of asceticism is compared to al-Sarrāj's section on the same topic quoted at the start of this chapter, key differences emerge that indicate al-Qushayrī's reticence to externalized asceticism. For instance, al-Qushayrī is ambivalent on the subject of austerities like

[82] Sulamī, 220–21.

avoiding profit, in contradistinction to al-Sarrāj's unilateral praise of asceticism as the foundation of the spiritual journey. A side-by-side comparison of al-Qushayrī's *Epistle* and the *Lumaʿ* reveals a great many similarities, including discussion of the same topics and the use of the same teachings such as the Unveiled Bride passage. While al-Sarrāj is a great advocate of asceticism as the foundation of Sufi practice, al-Qushayrī qualifies his discussion of asceticism by addressing conflicts of opinion on the meaning of true asceticism. Al-Qushayrī presents an account of asceticism fraught with conflict and marked by a lack of certainty about what true asceticism looks like.[83] He writes,

> The folk's opinions differ regarding renunciation (*zuhd*). Some of them argue that one should only renounce that which is prohibited, because that which is lawful has been made permissible by God Most High. If God bestows upon his servant licit property and the servant devotes himself to worshiping God out of gratitude for His generosity, then his abandoning this property is no better than keeping it by God's leave.
>
> Others say that the renunciation of that which is prohibited is an obligation, whereas renouncing that which is lawful is a virtue. They also say that having little property -- provided that the servant of God endures his condition patiently, satisfied with whatever God has apportioned for him and content with what God bestows upon him—is better than living comfortably and lavishly in this world, for God Most High urged His creatures to abstain from this world, when He said: "The enjoyment of this world is little; the world to come is better for him who fears God.[84]

Al-Qushayrī thus presents an ambivalent account of asceticism's role in the Sufi journey, stating that some consider excessive poverty undesirable for spiritual growth. Al-Qushayrī then shares on behalf of al-Sulamī:

> I heard Shaykh Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, may God have mercy on him, say: Aḥmād b. Ismāʿīl al-Azdī told us: ʿImrān b. Mūsā al-Isfanjī told us: al-Dawraqī told us: Wakīʿ told

[83] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 151–55; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 134–38.. Knysh chooses to translate *zuhd* as "renunciation" rather than "asceticism." I have retained his translation given the rest of the excerpt alluding to renouncing various things as a mark of asceticism.
[84] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 151–52; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 134.

> us that Sufyān al-Thawrī said: "Renunciation of this world means cutting short one's hopes rather than eating coarse food or wearing a woolen cloak."[85]

Al-Qushayrī's use of al-Sulamī's teachings to decry the practice of wearing wool and austere eating habits indicates both authors' disapproval of practices like ʿAwna's self-mortification. While al-Qushayrī goes on to quote various parts of al-Sarrāj's entry on *zuhd*, including sayings attributed to Baghdadi Sufis like Junayd—the debates regarding asceticism and specifically the saying he attributes to al-Sulamī that diminishes the role of wearing of a woolen cloak and eating coarse food has no true parallel in al-Sarrāj's section on *zuhd*. Similar sentiments appear at the end of al-Sarrāj's book in the section where he delineates what he believes to be errors Sufis of his time were falling into, but these are set apart from his discussions of asceticism.

Rather than endorsing the excessive pursuit of poverty, al-Qushayrī promotes an asceticism directed at severing attachments to the aspects of the feminized material world that would draw a male aspirant away from their ultimate spiritual goal. One of the main sources of attachment to the material world presented in al-Qushayrī's writings is women. It is intriguing that al-Qushayrī diverts so drastically from al-Sarrāj's account of asceticism but chooses to reproduce the aforementioned Unveiled Bride passage as a poignant method of conveying the passion with which a (male) ascetic should pursue material detachment. The gendering of the material world as feminine and coding her subjugator male in the unveiled bride passage presents an example of the use of gender in the abstract to construct Sufi asceticism.

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[85] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 152; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 134–35..

Yet al-Qushayrī goes further, taking the Sufi directive to overpower or otherwise completely neglect the feminine, and translating it from the realm of abstract symbolization into actual behavior towards women. While al-Sulamī chose to memorialize eighty-two female proto-Sufis as models of asceticism in his *Dhikr al-niswa* and cites two Sufi women in various parts of his Qur'anic commentary, al-Qushayrī includes only males Sufis in the biographical section of his *Risāla* and cites no women by name in his Qur'anic commentary. His *Risāla* also contains multiple instances where he promotes advice to Sufi aspirants to avoid the companionship of and desire for women.[86] The Unveiled Bride passage champions the gnostic over and above the ascetic who enacts violence on the body of the feminine through the gnostic's symbolic neglect of her. This idealized neglect of the feminine, presented as a goal that surpasses violently resisting her, finds expression both in al-Qushayrī's conscious decision to excise female ascetics from his accounts of Sufi history and his advice to other male Sufi aspirants to avoid women in their day-to-day life.

2.3.4 Gendering enemies in the factional wars of Nishapur

Antipathy to the Karrāmiyya motivated al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī to orient Sufi asceticism away from austere poverty and the donning of wool. However, in their attempts to establish a different kind of asceticism from that of the Karrāmis, both al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī distinguish free, elite men as the ideal spiritual subjects in a variety of subtle and overt ways. In the process, they relegate women, enslaved individuals, children, and even

[86] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 62, 335, 410; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 52, 313, 388.

free male opponents to the status of gendered spiritual hindrances for male Sufi aspirants.[87] A significant aspect of the construction of idealized Sufi masculinity is the treatment of opponents (who are free men) as somehow deficient in their manhood because of their heterodoxy. Thus, masculinizing ascetic discourse impacts women, but also anyone else who falls short of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's hegemonic ideals—whether physically, socially, or doctrinally.

Khaled El-Rouayheb argues that sexual intercourse in Arab-Islamic discourse is a "polarizing act," that demarcates the active penetrator as masculine and the passive recipient as feminine.[88] This polarization believed to be inherent in the sexual act means that the language of sex was used metaphorically in Islamic literature to demarcate power, distinguishing "the dominant from the dominated, the dishonorer from the dishonored, and the victorious from the defeated" and associating the inferior party with deficient masculinity.[89] Thus, when berating enemies, male Muslim writers often used the language of sexual dominance to assert their political, economic or theological superiority over their enemies. El-Rouayheb writes, "In the ongoing rivalries for posts, money, status, and influence in the exclusively male public sphere, allusions to phallic penetration were

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[87] El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*, 2005, 90. El-Rouayheb writes, "Sexual roles as a rule mirrored nonsexual relations of power, the sexually dominant (the penetrator) also being the socially dominant (the man, the husband, the master)." The congruency posed between sexual and political roles offers further insight into the gendered premise of social and political dynamics in medieval Islam.

[88] El-Rouayheb, 153.

[89] El-Rouayheb, 15. The tactic of demeaning enemies by gendering them deficient men occurs in other religious and political contexts, as Wieland notes in her analysis of anti-Semitic narratives of Jews in the nineteenth century. Wieland, "The Primitive Container of Fascism," 141.

always near at hand."[90] In one succinct example of politicized gendering, El-Rouayheb cites ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulsī (d. 1143/1731)'s dream interpretations, writing, "…to dream that one is sexually penetrating a rival or enemy forebodes that one will get the better of him in real life, whereas being penetrated by him is ominous, signifying the reverse."[91] While al-Nābulsī writes many centuries after al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī, we can trace similar constructions of elite masculinity as political dominance, theological rectitude and moral correctness and femininity/deficient masculinity as a way of sidelining enemies in the writings of Nishapuri Sufis.

Al-Sulamī conflates true manliness (*rujūliyya*) with a correct understanding of religion. In the *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, al-Sulamī quotes Sarī al-Saqatī saying, "A man (*rajul*) is not perfected until his religion overpowers his lust (*shahwatihi*)."[92] Juxtaposing the actualization of one's manhood with religious victory over lower-order desires constructs the correct performance of religion as analogous to true manliness. Al-Sulamī makes this connection between religion and masculinity clear in the following excerpt in which he quotes two preeminent male Nishapuri teachers, Abū ʿUthmān al-Ḥīrī (whose daughter and granddaughter appear in the *Dhikr*) as well as Abū Ḥafṣ al-Naysābūrī (whose two wives appear in the *Dhikr*). Both offer a hierarchy of masculinity rooted in one's level of spiritual attainment.

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[90] El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*, 2005, 15.
[91] El-Rouayheb, 13–14.
[92] Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, 57. Note that al-Sulamī uses the word *rajul* (man) here, not more commonly used, less gender-specific terms such as "*insān*," (human being). This quote constructs true masculinity as control over lust through one's religious commitment. The term *rajul* has, in this way, been applied to exceptional women such as Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya. Schimmel, *My Soul is a Woman*, 1997, 69-80.

> Abū ʿUthmān al-Ḥīrī al-Naysābūrī recalled that Abū Ḥafṣ had said, "Whoever gives and receives is a man. Whoever gives but does not receive is half a man. Whoever does not give and does not receive is a *boor* (*hamaj*)—*there is no good in him*."[93]
>
> Abū ʿUthmān was asked about the meaning of these words, so he said, "Whoever takes from God and gives to God is a man, because he does not recognize himself to be in a spiritual state through it. Whoever gives but does not take is half a man because he sees himself in that. He sees within himself a virtue in that he does not take. Whoever does not take and does not give is a boor, because he considers himself the giver and the receiver apart from God, exalted."[94]

The word I have translated here as a boor (*hamaj*) when applied to people refers to those considered base, ignorant, idiotic or uncultured.[95] The word recurs most commonly as part of a ḥadīth that categorizes all of humanity as one of two types of men, the one who has knowledge and the one who learns knowledge, the rest labelled *hamaj*. It also appears in a line of poetry al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 155/868-9) attributes to al-Ḥārith b. Ḥallaza that describes a young man causing destruction in the manner of a boor (*hamaj*).[96] Al-Sulamī thus presents a hierarchy of gendered spirituality led by "full men" who demonstrate command of Sufi metaphysical doctrine by attributing agency only to God. These men are followed by "half men" who attribute agency to themselves and thus only partially enact Sufi doctrine. Finally, the lowest rank of men, cast as idiotic and uncultured non-men, are those who do not possess the right religious perspective at all. Al-Sulamī thus conflates those who are enemies of the refined, elite Sufi men of Nishapur with a deficient masculinity and

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[93] The words I have italicized here come from a ḥadīth variously attributed to Muḥammad, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib or Abū al-Dardāʾ, cited in various forms in the Qur'anic commentaries of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), Q2:31, Q47:4, Q101:6; Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), Q6:32; and Niẓām Al-Dīn al-Naysābūrī (d. 728/1328) Q2:31-33. Al-Naysābūrī's version, copied from al-Rāzī's interpretation of Q2:31 reads, "People consist of two types of men: the one who knows and the one who is learned. Anyone else is a boor (*hamaj*), there is no good in him." These references are drawn from the Maktaba al-Shamela database.
[94] Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Ṣūfiyya*, 107.
[95] Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *Tāj Al-ʿArūs*, q.v. "hamaja." C.f. Zamakhsharī, Bajāwī, and Ibrāhīm, *Al-Fāʾiq fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*, 157.
[96] Jāḥiẓ, *Al-Bukhalā'*, 216.

attributes their lack of true masculinity with weak understanding. Given the rural, lower economic status of the Karrāmis—al-Sulamī's conflation of correct religion with the refined, urban elite of the free men of Nishapur stands in contrast to his perception of heterodox ascetics as boorish, deviant, and inferior in masculinity.

Al-Qushayrī offers similarly emasculating allusions to male enemies in his *Risāla* but further genders his language by equating enemies not just with deficient masculinity but grouping them with male adolescents and women as well. Al-Qushayrī presents friendship with women, consorting with enemies, and engaging male adolescents in sexual intercourse as great obstacles on the spiritual path of male Sufis, writing: Yūsuf b. al-Ḥusayn said: "I see afflictions of the Sufis in the following things: seeking friendship with adolescents, keeping company with adversaries, and befriending women."[97] Here, al-Qushayrī alludes to the prevalent practice of older men sexually consorting with male adolescents in classical Islamicate societies and deems spending time with enemies and women equally egregious.[98] In pederastic relationships, the male youth was assumed to be the recipient of sexual penetration and thus the older man retained his performance of masculinity since Islamicate discourses of sexuality prior to the modern period considered any sexual act of penetration, regardless of the gender of the recipient, a performance of

[97] Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 52, 313. Salamah-Qudsi notes that Yūsuf b. al-Ḥusayn was known to have struggled with desire for male youths—something that al-Qushayrī ignores in conveying these teachings against women, male youths, and enemies. See Salamah-Qudsi, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety*, 2018, 250–51.
[98] These male adolescents were often termed "beardless youths" to indicate their adolescent status. Bruce Dunne offers a thorough analysis of pederasty in Islamicate societies in "Homosexuality in the Middle East: An Agenda for Historical Research," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 12:3 (Summer 1990), 55-82. See also El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*, 11-12.

masculinity.[99] Thus, the penetrator enacts the dominant social and sexual position while his young lover resides in an in-between space, neither fully in possession of his masculinity and not completely reduced to the status of women, despite temporarily undertaking what was then considered a sexual position associated with women, male adolescents, *mukhannaths*, and sometimes eunuchs, but not normatively with free men.[100] The equivalency al-Qushayrī posits between (male) enemies and those who fall short of the free, elite male ideal, in addition to his presentation of these relationships as "afflictions" for Sufi aspirants, indicates his inability to understand Sufism, power and conflict outside the realm of gendered symbolic language. Al-Qushayrī's recurrent advice to avoid these imperfect,[101] not-fully-masculine bodies indicates two important things: First, he presumes that Sufi aspirants were by default elite men struggling with uniquely male issues. Second, he considers the non-masculine an obstacle to spiritual progression in every form that it may appear, whether it be the symbolically feminine material world, female bodies, unmanly men or adolescent male bodies.[102] Thus, al-Qushayrī casts Sufism as a spiritual program for conforming free, elite, male bodies.

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[99] El-Rouayheb, 7, 12. See also Rowson, "The Effeminates of Early Medina," 685–86.

[100] El-Rouayheb, 12, 26–27. El-Rouayheb speaks of a "relative femanization" of male youths through their sexual companionship with older male pederasts. He also suggests that these beardless youths functioned in a way as "ersatz women," El-Rouayheb, 28. The conflation of these youths with femininity or effeminacy is contested by Najmabadi, Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, 58–59.

[101] Ash Geissinger writes that late medieval Muslim texts were to a certain extent influenced by the Galenic idea that free, able-bodied males were considered the most perfect iteration of the human body with everyone else diverging biologically from this ideal in degrees. While Aristotelian notions of a fundamental difference in male and female bodies became influential in later discourses, the Galenic "one-sex body" model is congruent with Sufi discourses that center elite masculinity and measure all others against that standard. Geissinger, *Gender and Muslim Constructions of Exegetical Authority*, 35-6.

[102] Annemarie Schimmel writes, "The ascetic's fear of *shahwa,* "lust" or "desire", gave rise to the idea that "women's companionship gnaws away at the roots of life." Schimmel, *My Soul Is a Woman*, 1997, 73.

In an environment of intense competition and social complexity, the delineation of a comprehensive Sufi identity necessitated clear boundaries in doctrine and practice. Al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's use of gendered language to draw these boundaries placed free, elite men at the center and women and children along with political opponents at the margins. Lived reality often contradicts idealized rules and categories, and thus many of these social inferiors of Nishapuri society continued to be involved in Sufi ascetic practices—despite al-Qushayrī's attempts to excise them from his narrative of Sufi history. Nevertheless, al-Qushayrī's attempts to develop al-Sulamī's Malāmati ideals and present a coherent image of asceticism through a Sufism intended for male spiritual subjects impacted Sufi written history in subsequent generations. Sufi writings continue to gender the ascetic path as a male endeavor in the face of female/feminized/not-fully-masculine threats to Sufi orthodoxy.

2.3.5 The role of women in Nishapur's conflicts

Analyzing al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's conflicted presentation of asceticism reveals that, despite the influence of Baghdadi, Syrian and Basran Sufism on Nishapuri asceticism, Nishapuri asceticism took form in response to a unique set of sociopolitical circumstances related to the rise of the Karrāmi threat. Their responses to these threats included the use of gendering to create a distinct Sufi identity diametrically opposed to Karrāmi practice and doctrine. Scholars have overlooked the impact of the Karrāmi sociopolitical turmoil on the women of Nishapur. Some scholars argue that women remained largely unaffected by the sociopolitical conflicts that caused multiple rounds of state-sanctioned persecution and resulted in the imprisonment and exile of many scholars

including al-Qushayrī himself.[103] The scholars who argue that women were not impacted by the sectarian debates in Nishapur have overlooked the role of gendered ideology in the factional conflicts of Nishapur.

In her discussion of female scholars of ḥadīth in Nishapur, Asma Sayeed argues, "Women were central to the survival of 'ulama' kinship networks." She then adds, "As women, they were more sheltered from the political and factional violence that claimed the careers and lives of many male scholars,[104]…women were not victims of political and sectarian violence as often as men were."[105] Here, Sayeed suggests that the opposition to the Karrāmiyya, the Ghaznavid support of Karrāmi leader Abū Bakr Maḥmashādh (d. 421/1030) and his subsequent widespread targeting of Ashʿarī-Shāfiʿīs, Ḥanafīs and Ismāʿīlīs did not impact women,[106] though it caused life-altering consequences for the male scholars of Nishapur. While I found no historical evidence to suggest women were specifically targeted for physical violence or jailed by Karrāmi officials in Nishapur, an analysis of the biographies of Nishapuri women from the fifth/eleventh to the sixth/twelfth century and an investigation of gendered language in Sufi discourse reveals the impact of Karrāmi antipathy in how male Sufi authors perceive and depict women, particularly in the realm of asceticism and Sufi practices. In contemplating how Sufism took form in the crucible of the urban factionalism of Nishapur and how both politically fraught and highly gendered the formation of Sufi asceticism in Nishapur was, it is worth investigating the

[103] Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar*, 40–42.
[104] Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam*, 2013, 141.
[105] Sayeed, 141n.103.
[106] Malamud, "The Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan," 45–46.

impact of these forces on the women of Nishapur—especially given the role of patrician women in creating links in scholarly networks, their ascetic practices and their participation in public spaces of intellectual engagement.

2.3.6 Social tensions between Sufi men and women

According to al-Sulamī's hagiographical entries of early mystics and ascetics, formative Sufism hosted vibrant communities of male and female ascetics who comingled regularly in the pursuit of spiritual practice and mystical debate—but not without tension.[107] Al-Sulamī records several interesting interactions between male and female ascetics that depicts fraught gender-charged social altercations.[108] In the final entry of his *Dhikr al-niswa*, he introduces ʿĀʾisha al-Marwaziyya, an affluent Sufi practitioner from Merv, the second largest city in Khurasan after Nishapur. Al-Sulamī notes she was the most spiritually accomplished of her age. Despite her advanced spiritual attainment, a man refuses her charitable donation on account of her gender.[109]

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[107] Regarding a later period, Bashir writes, ""The limitation on cross-gender physical contact underscores women's very narrow access to the time, history, and social world reflected in Awbahi's text." Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 6. He goes on to say, "...I argue that a more significant element in women's systematic lack of access to this world was that they could not cultivate intimacies with male Sufis that required unrestricted corporeal contact." Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 21. While there is merit to Bashir's estimation, the fact he analyzes a later period of Sufism may indicate further reifying of gender boundaries in later Sufi periods. By contrast, al-Sulamī depicts the formative period of Sufism as one in which men and women regularly accompanied each other at various sites of Sufi practice.

[108] Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections*, 100–101.

[109] For a discussion of the role of women's donation in early Sufism, see Salamah-Qudsi, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety*, 2018, 69–71. Salamah-Qudsi argues that the rejection of female donations, gifts and companionship may not have been gendered, despite the fact that, in every occurrence recorded in al-Sulamī's *Dhikr*, the men distinctly state they do not accept such things from women. I disagree with her valuation given the specific references to gender the men include in their statements.

> It was said to ʿĀʾisha bt. Aḥmad al-Ṭawīl al-Marwaziyya, "So-and-so does not approve of your gift (*rifq*). He said there is dishonor in accepting the donations of women." She replied, "When the slave seeks glory in his servitude, his foolishness is revealed."[110]

The rejection of ʿĀʾisha's gift based on her gender in this anecdote indicates normalized, or rather idealized, male avoidance of interaction with female Sufis. It also implies that ʿĀʾisha might have espoused Malāmati teachings that would make her skeptical of ostentatious acts of voluntary poverty. ʿĀʾisha is one of many women al-Sulamī records in standoffs with men.[111] Despite al-Sulamī chronicling a number of tense events between men and women as some men struggled to accept female presence in public spaces, al-Sulamī also includes many notices of mystic and ascetic women who taught, accompanied and stayed in the homes of male mystics and ascetics.[112] Decades later, al-Sulamī's student al-Qushayrī denounced the companionship of women in a manner similar to ʿĀʾisha al-Marwaziyya's critic,[113] despite marrying Fāṭima al-Daqqāqiyya, a preeminent Nishapuri scholar and ascetic and overseeing the spiritual training of exemplary daughters and granddaughters in partnership with his wife.[114] Al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī are only two of a number of Nishapuri men who were engaged in ascetic practices and mystical teachings

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[110] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 258–59. The word *rifq* can refer to "companionship" in the same way that the Arabic *rafīq* means a companion. Cornell translates the word *rifq* as "gift," alluding to monetary donations female Sufis offered to male Sufis to support their spiritual practice (see previous footnote). While each translation offers different nuances, the use of gender differentiation to encourage the masculinization of Sufi circles functions similarly in both circumstances.

[111] Sulamī, 78, 142, 168, 204, 224.

[112] Sulamī, 74, 106, 128, 142, 148, 150, 152, 154, 158, 172, 180, 196, 204, 210, 212, 226, 234, 240, 244, 246, 248, 250. Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014, 45–46. Salamah-Qudsi, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety*, 2018, 101.

[113] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 62, 335, 410; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 52, 313, 388.

[114] Fāṭima was a famed scholar-mystic trained by her famous Sufi father Abū ʿAli al-Daqqaq. For background information, see Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam*, 2013, 126–38. For entries on her female descendants, see Fārisī and Ṣarfīnī, *Al-Muntakhab min al-Siyāq li-Tārīkh Naysābūr*, #688, #1485.

alongside women but felt the need to question and negotiate the presence of women amongst them. These social anxieties occupied male Sufi authors not just in their attempts to monitor their local teaching circles, but discursively through gendering the earthly and material temptations feminine in their attempts to fully delineate their male Sufi views of the world.

2.3.7 Depictions of women in Nishapuri Sufi hagiographies

A great deal of gendered resistance can be discerned in the hagiographical literature of Sufi authors where biographies of preeminent, mostly male spiritual masters are recorded. While earlier Sufis such as Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), al-Sarrāj (d. 378/988) and al-Kalabādhī (d. 380/990) cited one or two female ascetics in their writings, they largely focused on the teachings of male ascetics.[115] Meanwhile, al-Sulamī collected notices of a total of eighty-two women, cementing the place of a broad range of female ascetics and mystics in the narrative history of Sufism. He recorded their accomplishments, death dates, spiritual aphorisms, and included details of their networks of teachers, students and kin. Al-Sulamī's encyclopedia of Sufi women appears as an appendix to another biographical dictionary, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* (The Generations of the Sufis). The *Ṭabaqāt* contains notices of 104 male mystics and ascetics arranged in five generations beginning with the generation following the *atbāʿ al-tābiʿūn* (the successors of the Successors),

[115] When male Sufi authors cite a female Sufi, it is usually Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya. A thorough discussion of the extensive use of Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya as a spiritual "icon" can be found in Cornell, *Rabi'a from Narrative to Myth: The Many Faces of Islam's Most Famous Woman Saint, Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya*, 261–71.

thereby creating a verifiable chain of transmission connecting Muhammad and his companions to the Sufis of al-Sulamī's day.[116]

The women of the *Dhikr* are less obviously arranged by generation and their entries lack the diligent focus on ḥadīth transmissions, indicating these female biographies served a different purpose for al-Sulamī than their male counterparts. Instead of utilizing these women as part of his broader attempt to align Nishapuri Sufism with orthodox, legalistic Sunnism, al-Sulamī collects the names of women from Basra, Syria, Khurasan, Baghdad, Damaghan and Yemen and writes of their spiritual and ascetic feats to paint evocative images of Sufi practice. While al-Sulamī centers his male entries on ḥadīth transmissions and teacher-student lineages, his female entries are shorter, detailing specific spiritual practices these women engaged and the Sufi men and women with whom they interacted. Women's spiritual practices varied by location but were not noticeably differentiated from male spiritual practices, largely entailing a variety of ascetic endeavors including excessive fasting, extended night vigils and vows of silence or chastity. While women's spiritual practices did not diverge significantly from male practices in al-Sulamī's biographical entries, their entries are gendered in ways that assert the prominence of male ascetics while diminishing female spiritual practitioners through insertions of tense confrontations with

[116] Bashir writes, "...the passage of time is indicated through human lifespans whose sequencing together brings one close to the Prophet's body." Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 5. The importance of this temporal link is addressed in Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar*, 56–58. See also Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī*, 11.

men in female biographies and foregrounding women's familial connections and roles as mothers and sisters rather than their spiritual ranks.[117]

In the years following al-Sulamī's work, his student al-Qushayrī purposefully excised the biographies of al-Sulamī's female ascetics from his own writings, even while reproducing most of al-Sulamī's notices on men in the hagiographical portion of his *Risāla*.[118] In addition to removing biographical notices of female Sufis, al-Qushayrī furthered the gendering of Sufi asceticism that had begun with al-Sarrāj, casting Sufism as a male-centric endeavor of detachment from the earthly world he abstractly characterized as feminine. Al-Qushayrī's patent reversal of al-Sulamī's inclusion of women is a marked choice to widen the gap between free, elite male ascetics, and the other members of Nishapuri society.[119] Al-Qushayrī typically idealizes free elite masculinity while denoting the inferior status of women, enslaved individuals, children, male opponents, and dark-skinned people through stories that center male spiritual accomplishments and sidelined the identities and achievements of others. In addition to reinforcing patriarchal social hierarchy, al-Qushayrī makes use of this hierarchy metaphorically in many instances to

[117] For the prominence of familial connections in depictions of Sufi women, see Salamah-Qudsi, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety*, 2018, 44–47, 83–102. Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014, 39–41.
[118] On some purposeful omissions in al-Qushayrī's *Risāla*, see Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī*, 104.
[119] In addition to gendering women as spiritual hindrance for men, al-Qushayrī identifies enslaved individuals, dark-skinned individuals and beardless youths (with whom adult men would consort) as inferior to free, elite men in some way throughout his *Risāla*. Thus, any study of gendering in al-Qushayrī's writings necessitates looking beyond his depiction of women and analyzing his representation of all who, in his mind, fall short of the patriarchal ideal. The depiction of these social others in al-Qushayrī's *Risāla* is analyzed in Chapter Three.

sketch salient aspects of Sufi asceticism as a primarily male undertaking and convey Sufi teachings on cultivating pure actions and intentions.

2.4 After the Karrāmis: Sixth/twelfth-century Nishapur

Despite al-Qushayrī's heavy gendering of asceticism around male bodies and al-Sulamī's presentation of Nishapuri women as opponents of austere practices, al-Qushayrī's grandson Abū Bakr al-Fārisī includes biographical notices of many ascetic women from Nishapur that reveal the continued prevalence of externalized ascetic practices. Practices of asceticism proliferated amongst women in Nishapur with some women choosing to remain celibate and unmarried while others undertaking rigorous devotional practices of fasting, praying and self-seclusion. Despite al-Qushayrī's attempt to center asceticism on inner detachment rather than outward renunciation of material goods, externalized ascetic practices continued to draw notice as markers of piety for both men and women. However, there are noticeable differences between the women of al-Sulamī's *Dhikr* and those al-Fārisī records two generations later—indicating al-Qushayrī's influence on the discourse of Sufi asceticism. While al-Sulamī describes a diverse range of women participating in teaching circles, serving men and women as disciples and wandering different cities seeking teachers, al-Fārisī's women seem to rarely travel and their asceticism is limited to supplementary prayer and the donation of wealth.

All the women al-Fārisī memorializes come from prominent patrician families in Nishapur, and their familial influence offered them the time and resources to engage in the practices that they undertook. While al-Sulamī includes some Nishapuri women born into

patrician families or prominent Sufi kinship networks,[120] many of al-Sulamī's women were non-elite wanderers who took up the company and service of a Sufi master.[121] Al-Fārisī's focus on the elite women of Nishapur indicates the narrative of Sufi history gradually centered on those with privileged access to religious texts and rituals over the duration of only a couple of generations in Nishapur—which excluded rival Karrāmi discourses who were of a lower socioeconomic status. Interestingly, while the women of al-Sulamī's era were remembered for seeking out masters to serve and hosting teaching circles attended by many, the women of al-Fārisī's era seem to have rarely hosted their own teaching circles, even though they transmitted many ḥadīths and writings one-on-one.[122] We know it must have been quite unusual for women to host their own circles by the seventh/thirteenth century based on Ibrāhīm al-Ṣarfīnī's (d. 641/1243) recension of al-Fārisī's biographies, where he writes that al-Fārisī's grandmother and al-Qushayrī's wife, Fāṭima al-Daqqāqiyya, hosted sessions only because Abū ʿAlī al-Daqqāq did not have a son and harbored excessively sentimental feelings for her. Al-Ṣarfīnī writes,

> Her father convened a *dhikr* assembly for her and he had her memorize the material [recited] in assemblies because of his high opinion of her. At that time [i.e., when she was young], he did not have a son, so all his attention was devoted to this daughter. She was born in the year 391. This was the same year in which he [i.e., her father] built the blessed *madrasa*. When she matured, he married her to Imām Zayn al-Islām after she had combined different types of virtues.[123]

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[120] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 142–43, 156–57, 176–77, 184–85, 218–19.
[121] Sulamī, 180–81, 226–27, 242–43, 244–45, 250–51. Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014, 43–45.
[122] An exception to this is Karīma al-Marwaziyya whom al-Fārisī depicts as travelling widely and disseminating multiple texts to him and other students. See Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam*, 2013, 114–25.
[123] Fārisī and Ṣarfīnī, *Al-Muntakhab min al-Siyāq li-Tārīkh Naysābūr*, #1431. Sayeed, 127.

Al-Ṣarfīnī is quick to point out that, despite Fāṭima al-Daqqāqiyya's public activities, she was married to al-Qushayrī (whose epithet in Nishapur was Zayn al-Islām or "the ornament of Islam") soon after her youth. The disclaimers al-Ṣarfīnī includes here to justify Fāṭima al-Daqqāqiyya's access to learning circles are not found in earlier recensions of al-Fārisī's history of Nishapur. This may indicate an increased resistance to women's public participation in Nishapur over intervening centuries between al-Qushayrī and al-Ṣarfīnī.

Al-Fārisī depicts a number of ascetic activities of Nishapuri women but heavily genders their spiritual identities, indicating that al-Qushayrī's ideological move did not eliminate externalized asceticism but that his gendering of Sufism persisted in continued constructions of men's spirituality as different from women's asceticism. Al-Fārisī typically identifies the women in his histories of Nishapur through epithets like ʿ*afīfa* (chaste), *sāliḥa* (virtuous) and *satīra* (concealed). He only once identifies someone by the term *zāhida* (ascetic), and that is his sister Amat al-Ghāfir Durdāne, who he remarks spent years in prayer and silence.[124] Just as al-Sulamī emphasized silence as a practice of Nishapuri women, so does al-Fārisī indicate that to be the case with his sister.

The terminology of asceticism (*zuhd*) only appears one more time in al-Fārisī's notices—in his entry on his mother Karīma Amat al-Raḥīm. Al-Fārisī writes, "She undertook the path of piety (ʿ*ibāda*) and asceticism (*zuhd*) from her mother al-Ḥurra (Fāṭima al-Daqqāqiyya) and her brothers and sisters, and the path of gnosis (*maʿrifa*) from

[124] Fārisī and Ṣarfīnī, *Al-Muntakhab min al-Siyāq li-Tārīkh Naysābūr*, #688. Interestingly, al-Fārisī only describes nine men out of thousands by the masculine counterpart *zāhid*, corroborating al-Qushayrī's argument that the term fell out of use.

her father and her brothers."[125] That al-Fārisi associates his mother's asceticism (*zuhd*) with her female relatives and gnostic knowledge (*maʿrifa*) with her male relatives speaks to the ways in which al-Qushayrī promoted gnosis over asceticism, while his female kin continued to practice asceticism. Like al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī, al-Fārisī continued to construct gnosis as the highest Sufi ideal—echoing the Nishapuri women of al-Sulamī's *Dhikr* who diminished asceticism in favor of gnostic pursuits in earlier generations. Al-Fārisī's mother, sister and grandmother are the only ones in more than twenty entries to be associated with *zuhd* or asceticism directly.

Al-Fārisī depicts his grandmother and sister as having exerted themselves immensely in prayer, while his mother refused to wear silk and withdrew from the world as much as possible. It is intriguing that al-Fārisī attributes asceticism to his female kin alone and no other women, despite his grandfather al-Qushayrī's attempts to reduce externalized asceticism and promote inner renunciation. Al-Fārisī's biographical writings offer glimpses of continued externalized ascetic practices with his female relatives and the inheritance of ascetic teachings amongst them. However, al-Fārisī takes great care to dissociate al-Qushayrī from these teachings. These notices indicate al-Qushayrī's continued influence in defining acceptable asceticism, even after the decline of Karrāmi influence in Nishapur.

In addition to constructing asceticism as the realm of his female kin, while gnosis seemed to be the realm of his male kin, al-Fārisī separates male and female Sufi identity

[125] Fārisī and Ṣarfīnī, #1485.

through his use of epithets in his biographical entries. The term *ʿafīf*/*ʿafīfa* (meaning chaste or virtuous) occurs commonly throughout his biographical entries, but is often qualified for men with additional adjectives, such as *ʿafīf al-nafs* (pure of self), *ʿafīf al-bāṭin* (inwardly pure), and *ʿafīf al-sarīra* (pure of heart).[126] The full implications of these gendered presentations of chastity are explored in Chapter Four of this dissertation. For now, the very fact that al-Fārisī differentiates between the gender of different Sufi practitioners using specific epithets indicates a bifurcation of Sufi practitioners along gender lines.

Another term that reinforces gender differentiation in al-Fārisī's biographical encyclopedia of Nishapuri notables is that of *satīra* and *mastūr*. While, al-Fārisī refers to a few women by the epithet *al-satīra* (the veiler), he never describes a man by the corresponding masculine word *al-satīr* although he uses the term *mastūr* (veiled) for his male entries. The feminine version *mastūra* is never used. Linguistically, the difference between the *satīra* and *mastūr* is the difference between the active subject of the verb ("the doer") and the passive recipient of it ("the one done to"). The grammatical derivations are employed exclusively to each gender and thus point to different meanings that indicate some level of gendering asceticism. *Satīra* may indicate physical veiling by means of cloth and it is likely that the term *mastūr* refers to one who is protected or shielded, indicating that these men did no wrongdoing or harm, or perhaps that their sanctity is hidden from the eyes of others. Regardless of the meaning of the terms, the linguistic gendering and choice

[126] Fārisī and Ṣarfīnī, #309, #321, #339, #954, #988, #1441.

to exclusively apply certain labels on the basis of gender indicates a cultural context in which male and female ascetics had to be distinguished from each other.

While the women of the Daqqāqi/Qushayrī lineage engaged in practices of chastity, fasting, and prayer, their asceticism was related in the biographical literature in a gendered manner in ways notices of earlier women were not. The practices of ascetics in al-Sulamī's biographical encyclopedias did not differ across gender lines, but the men and women of al-Fārisī's biographical notices are distinguished by different epithets, knowledge pursuits and practices. This points to the impact of al-Qushayrī's gendered discourse in widening the gap between male and female ascetics.

2.5 Conclusion

I began this chapter by presenting positive early Sufi depictions of externalized asceticism in the centuries preceding the writings of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī, concluding that bodily performances of asceticism were encouraged under the guidance of spiritual masters and were subtly gendered masculine through conflations of the material world with women and femininity. I then analyzed the sociopolitical climate in which al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī wrote, concluding that the threat of Karrāmi dominance in the political arena provoked al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī to harden boundaries around Sufi identity. These authors established an ideological move away from the externalized performances of asceticism characteristic of earlier Sufism to an inner renunciation gendered masculine and set in opposition to the feminine material world constructed by al-Sarrāj and al-Kalabādhī a century prior. Finally, a brief survey of al-Fārisī's writings several decades after the fall of Karrāmi influence in Nishapur revealed that al-Qushayrī's attempts to eliminate

externalized performances of asceticism failed, even while his stark gendering of Sufism persisted. The remaining chapters will now analyze the role of gendering Sufi discourse in the depiction of ascetic exercises and in the construction of Sufism as an elite androcentric religious movement.

3 *Khalwa*: Institutionalizing Seclusion

The institutionalization of Nishapuri Sufism arose out of a context shaped in part by urban-rural conflict. The ideological confrontation between Malāmati ideals and Karrāmi practices had an impact on the framing of asceticism and depiction of early Sufi figures. It also centered the practice of Sufism in institutional urban spaces that were directed and regulated by elite men. The ideological battle over asceticism was not simply a conflict of words and doctrines as its impact quickly spread beyond ideas of asceticism and gendered discourse. The ideological construction of a distinct androcentric Sufi identity in Nishapur shaped the physical construction of Sufi lodges (*khānaqāhs*) where it was easier to regulate membership and propagate androcentric communal identity. As a result, it became easier to reinforce elite male agency and spiritual subjectivity while marginalizing non-elite and non-male participants from centers of Sufi practice. This chapter will examine the decline in popularity of the ascetic practice of *siyāḥa*, wandering the wilderness, and the rise of urban collective seclusion (*khalwa*) as a practice undertaken within the physical walls of Sufi lodges. I use one of al-Sulamī's students and a companion of al-Qushayrī's, Abū Saʿīd b. Abū al-Khayr (d. 440/1049), to illustrate specific aspects of how Sufi institutions in Nishapur coalesced into rigid, androcentric sites of elite, urban practice.

Abū Saʿīd b. Abū al-Khayr presents an important counterpoint to al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī because he was an ascetic of non-Nishapuri origin who founded a number of *khānaqāhs* throughout Khurasan. Abū Saʿīd spent a significant portion of his later life in Nishapur where his initial radical asceticism evolved into modes of spirituality more akin to Nishapuri Malāmatism. At the same time, his practices remained distinct enough from

his Nishapuri counterparts that he received criticism from notable Nishapuri leaders, including Sufis like al-Qushayrī and also Karrāmis like Abū Bakr Maḥmashādh, the Karrāmi official of Nishapur referenced in Chapter Two.[1] Before settling in Nishapur, Abū Saʿīd engaged in extreme acts of self-deprivation including wandering the desert, praying while suspended upside down, perpetual fasting and self-mortification.[2] In Nishapur, he abandoned his old asceticism in favor of indulging in feasts with his disciples and hosting spiritual music concerts that included the practice of *shāhid-bāzī* (gazing at youths). Thus, while Abū Saʿīd adapted to Nishapuri Sufism in some ways by casting aside externalized asceticism, he distinguished himself from the Sufis of Nishapur through excessive indulgence in food and *samāʿ* (spiritual concerts). While not fully antinomian, he defied social hierarchies of age and gender within his *khānaqāh* by having the young sit with the old regardless of their status.[3] He also seems to have instituted a female wing to his *khānaqāh* under the direction of his wife.[4] Abū Saʿīd's story offers glimpses of how the inward turn in Nishapuri Sufism affected different groups of Sufis in unique ways. It also provides a non-Nishapuri's perspective on the social intricacies of the Nishapuri Sufi scene.

3.1.1 Early ascetic wandering

Early Muslim ascetics, including Abū Saʿīd, undertook practices of wandering the wilderness (*siyāḥa*), which were regarded as ways to train one's will through voluntary

[1] Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 29–31.
[2] Nicholson, 15; Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 241–42.
[3] Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 57–59.
[4] Nicholson, 69–70.

self-isolation from society (ʿ*uzla*).[5] The purported goal of such practices was to depart from settled, communal life and cultivate *tawakkul*—reliance upon God alone. There are Qur'anic precedents for desert wandering particularly in the story of Moses and Mary. However, there is little focus on Qur'anic precedent for wandering the desert in Sufi interpretations of these stories, despite the obvious parallel. This indicates declining interest in *siyāḥa* as a Sufi practice after the formative period, which is when the bulk of Sufi interpretations of the Qur'an were written. [6]

Sufis began to deride solitary isolation through travel before the fifth/eleventh century, prioritizing collective rituals over individual exercises.[7] Over the course of the fifth/eleventh century, the practice of departing from society alone evolved into collective forms of seclusion within the confines of the *khānaqāh* (Sufi lodge). Salamah-Qudsi states, "After the fifth/eleventh century, the process of "stabilization" of Sufi activities in particular spaces contributed to change the early Sufi principles in which spiritual progress was combined with, or even conditioned upon, spatial and physical mobility."[8] Abū Saʿīd is reported to have wandered through the deserts and mountains extensively in the first forty years of his life.[9] Abū Saʿīd's initial interest in wandering in isolation is eventually

[5] Salamah-Qudsi, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety*, 2018, 48. For a thorough discussion of the differences and points of convergence between *siyāḥa, safar* and *riḥla* as notions of religious travel, see Salamah-Qudsi, "Crossing the Desert."
[6] Sufi interpretations of the story of Moses and Mary are discussed in Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qur'ān in Classical Islam*, 79–109. For a discussion of the Qur'anic story of Mary's birth of Jesus in the wilderness and some indications of Mary's wandering in the desert prior to the annunciation, see Geissinger, "Mary in the Qurʾan: Rereading Subversive Births."
[7] Salamah-Qudsi, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety*, 2018, 142–43.
[8] Salamah-Qudsi, 129.
[9] Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 12–14.

replaced by his recognition of the value of communal life. By the end of his life, he directed and founded a number of *khānaqāhs* throughout Khurasan.[10] In his ten rules for the observance of etiquette in the *khānaqāh*, he insists prayers should be performed communally and that dervishes should prioritize their presence together as a collective over their individual activities.[11] By prioritizing urban collective isolation in dedicated Sufi spaces over exurban self-seclusion and travel, male Sufis promoted homosocial networks that diminished the participation of non-elite and non-male ascetics.[12] With physical walls erected and gendered boundaries set in place, marginalized mystics were relegated to segregated spaces within the *khānaqāh*, as well as domestic and/or rural spaces outside the *khānaqāh* that isolated them from the centers of evolving normative Sufi practices.

The non-urban practice of ʿ*uzla* through *siyāḥa* lost favor in Sufi groups around the time that physical spaces dedicated solely to Sufi practice were being founded. However, *siyāḥa* continued to be employed narratively as a literary trope to depict miraculous events that bring about spiritual transformation in elite male subjects set in liminal spaces outside the typical areas of human activity. These stories privileged male subjectivity and authority and contributed to the marginalization of non-elite and non-male mystics by excluding them as ethical and spiritual subjects in the narrativized histories of Sufism. The urbanization of Sufism created gendered boundaries both in physical spaces that constructed the urban a center of elite male spiritual activity and in foregrounding male

[10] Nicholson, 74–75; Chabbi, "Kẖānḳāh."
[11] Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 46.
[12] Shahzad Bashir's research illustrates the prevalence of these gendered boundaries in the Later Medieval period. Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 21–22, 136.

spiritual subjectivities. The first part of this chapter will investigate the rise of the *khānaqāh* in Nishapur and the role of urban spaces in institutionalizing androcentric Sufism. The second part of this chapter addresses the continued use of *siyāḥa* in narrative modes to uphold androcentric Sufism through centering elite men as the default spiritual subjects.

3.1.2 The division of space

This chapter explores urban space as evolving sites of elite male activity set in contradistinction to domestic, rural, and exurban spaces. Richard Bulliet offers a vivid image of medieval Nishapur as a city with two main roads where the rich resided in the east and south while the poor and those affiliated with the Karrāmiyya lived in the northwest where resources such as water were more scarce.[13] Unlike other medieval Islamic cities like Baghdad and Cairo where the boundaries of the urban center were clearly marked by surrounding walls, Nishapur was not contained within walls, though it did contain a walled-off inner portion that was residential.[14] The great market and congregational mosque of Nishapur lay outside the interior walls, existing within the network of farmlands that came to form the outer city of Nishapur. Thus, urban space as understood by Nishapuri locals was not the space within the walls protected by the ruling elite. Urban space was a continuously contested network of structures including the market, mosque and residential neighborhoods that were endowed and maintained by local government and the patrician elite.

[13] Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, 8–13.
[14] Bulliet, 9.

The location of the poor and those affiliated with the Karrāmiyya in the northwestern corner of the city indicates how the mapping out of urban space reproduces class divisions. The poorer classes in Nishapur were housed at a distance from the centers of communal and religious life and thus had comparatively limited access to the sites of elite urban religious and communal practice. Paul Wheatley suggests that the bulk of tradespeople and lower-class individuals were largely bound to their domestic "nodes," the areas consisting of their living quarters, the courtyard shared with neighbors and the boundaries of their residential quarter.[15] They rarely ventured beyond their neighborhoods.[16] Often, those whose trade was considered less palatable to the local elite were located on the outskirts of the urban city. These tradespeople were associated with less refined comportment given their craft as well as their proximity to exurban nomadic cultures such as that of the Bedouins.[17] Similarly, elite urban sensibilities in medieval Nishapur centered on a notion of refinement of character that was associated with the upper echelons of society, and these upper class individuals occupied particular quarters of the urban landscape that separated them from members of lower classes.

Urban space, as understood by our Nishapuri authors, consisted of the central regions of the city regulated by endowments and overseen by members of the patrician class. Rural space included the remote parts of the city of Nishapur where the lower classes took up residence as well as village settlements beyond the city that continued to provide

[15] Wheatley, "Levels of Space Awareness in the Traditional Islamic City," 354.
[16] Wheatley, 354.
[17] Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 82, 90.

the elite of Nishapur with food supplies and surplus to trade.[18] Exurban space, that which lies in the hinterlands beyond the network of villages dependent upon the city, included the non-settled areas of the Islamicate empire where nomads and travellers passed through but did not dwell. It is through these exurban areas, the deserts, plains and mountains, that the early Sufis were said to have wandered in search of spiritual cultivation through harsh ascetic self-deprivation.

The conceptual division of space into urban, domestic, rural, and exurban has a gendered dimension. Al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's construction of masculinity includes an implicit conflation of the masculine ideal of refined comportment and education with the urban spaces of Nishapur and the conflation of the rural and exurban regions of Nishapur with the unruly and boorish behavior of the Karrāmiyya and the Bedouins. The poor who lived in rural areas were often in competition for resources and without the protection of the urban ruling classes.[19] Thus, the refined urban elite formed a network of protection and exchange that was largely inaccessible to others. The construction of idealized masculinity upon urban ideals heavily influenced Nishapuri Sufism and inspired discourses of *futuwwa*, codes of chivalry that perpetuated images of young men as ideal practitioners of spiritual virtues.[20]

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[18] Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, 10.
[19] Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 90.
[20] *Futuwwa* is sometimes presented as a separate movement from Malāmati Sufism with intersecting values that arose out of the merchant classes of Nishapur an elsewhere. For a brief introduction, see Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 245–46. For a discussion of Persian *futuwwa* in the *javānmardi* movement, Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism*.

The urban experience was different for women and depended on their class status. Unlike elite men who visited the schools and lodges of other elite men throughout Nishapur and broader Khurasan, elite women are depicted in historical sources as restricted in their mobility. It seems elite women bore the burden of maintaining social respectability through avoiding the company of unrelated men.[21] In one instructive story of Abū Saʿīd b. Abū al-Khayr's encounter with female ascetics in Nishapur, an elite woman called Īshī Nīlī begs to become a disciple of Abū Saʿīd's, leaving aside her elite Nishapuri sensibilities to follow his spiritual method. Nicholson translates,

> In Níshápúr there lived a woman of noble family, whose name was Íshí Nílí. She was a great ascetic, and on account of her piety the people of Níshápúr used to seek blessings from her. It was forty years since she had gone to the warm baths or set foot outside her house. When Abú Sa'íd came to Níshápúr and the report of his miracles spread through the city, she sent a nurse who always waited upon her, to hear him preach. [Later, after he heals her eyes from an illness she could not overcome]…she brought to the Shaykh all her jewelry and ornaments and dresses, and said, "O Shaykh! I have repented and have put every hostile feeling out of my heart." "May it bring thee blessing!" said he, and bade them conduct her to the mother of Bú Ṭáhir, that she might robe her in the gaberdine (*khirqa*). Íshí went in obedience to his command and donned the gaberdine and busied herself with serving the women of this fraternity (the Sufis). She gave up her house and goods, and rose to great eminence in this path, and became a leader of the Sufis.[22]

Despite being described as a leader of the Sufis, I could find no biographical information about Īshī Nīlī aside from her account in Abū Saʿīd's biography. Still, this anecdote reveals, as al-Fārisī documented later, that the primary mode of female asceticism in Nishapur in the fifth/eleventh century was expressed through the domestic seclusion of elite women. The female nurse, either a servant or a slave, is allowed greater mobility due to her lower social status and is depicted running errands on behalf of Īshī Nīlī and visiting male-

[21] Wheatley, "Levels of Space Awareness in the Traditional Islamic City," 355; Meisami, "Eleventh-Century Women: Evidence from Bayhaqi's History," 81.
[22] Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 69–70.

dominated spaces.[23] Thus, non-elite women in Nishapur who had to work were depicted as mobile within their neighborhoods and sometimes beyond if required. The early women noted in al-Sulamī's sources are depicted in a range of similar and other diverse circumstances, whether wandering exurban spaces seeking teachers or self-cultivation, working and teaching within rural and suburban spaces, or worshipping in private domestic spaces. By contrast, the women noted in later Nishapuri sources, like al-Fārisī's, are often represented in the same way as Īshī Nīlī in the period prior to her devotion to Abū Saʿīd. These elite women enact their spirituality through remaining secluded at home and devoting themselves to supplementary prayers and donations of their wealth. The change in depiction of women in Nishapuri writings indicates a shift in ideas of what is appropriate for elite and non-elite women to do. The implications of the location and behavior of ascetic women in different male-authored narratives is addressed in the rest of this chapter.

A final point to note is the mutability of dividing urban space into private and public spheres. Mazumdar and Mazumdar have noted the limitations of arguing for a domestic private sphere for women and a public sphere for men in Muslim societies.[24] Instead, they offer an argument for dynamic notions of public and private spheres that account for shifting functions of space depending on the activities of men and women undertake in different spaces throughout any given day. Mazumdar and Mazumdar also offer new perspectives on the impact of the activity of women on broader society despite limitations

[23] For some discussion of the seclusion of elite women and diverging expectations of women from lower social classes, see Urban, "Gender and Slavery in Islamic Political Thought," 283–85; El Cheikh, "Women's History: A Study of al-Tanūkhī," 134.
[24] Mazumdar and Mazumdar, "Rethinking Public and Private Space," 303.

on their mobility. Marion Holmes Katz similarly describes sacred space as subject to "temporal fluidity" and ongoing gender negotiations, as for example in the case of men and women who use mosques as public spaces in different ways at different times.[25] This chapter continues the work of nuancing depictions of Sufi women in exurban, urban and domestic spaces to explore how spaces are constructed repeatedly through power relations and defined by conceptual boundaries that reproduce gendered subjects.[26]

3.2 From wandering alone to collective seclusion

3.2.1 Wandering the wilderness

The practice of ascetic travel was particularly popular in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries. The most cited wandering ascetic in early Sufi literature is Ibrahīm b. al-Khawwāṣ (d. 291/904).[27] Like other ascetics, at times he wandered alone and sometimes he accompanied others in small groups. Ibrahīm b. al-Khawwāṣ seems to have undertaken journeys through desert hinterlands very often throughout his life. Aside from Ibrahīm b. al-Khawwāṣ, al-Sulamī depicts a number of male and female early ascetics and mystics as wanderers. Al-Sulamī notes about a dozen of his 104 male entries in the *Ṭabaqāt* engaged in ascetic travel and wandering, half of whom did so while undertaking the path to Mecca for the *ḥajj* pilgrimage. The difference between non-ascetic travel for the purpose of pilgrimage and the travels to Mecca attributed to these ascetics is simply a matter of the extent of asceticism. While regular pilgrims can be expected to carry provisions for their

[25] Katz, *Women in the Mosque*, 7–8.
[26] McDowell, *Gender, Identity, and Place*, 4.
[27] Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, 220.

journey, ascetics travelled without them to cultivate a deep assurance that God will provide the food and supplies they will need to survive the journey somehow. While the historical reliability of journeys without provision is up for debate, narratively such distinctions function as demonstrations of an ascetic's piety by presenting their travels as more arduous than a typical pilgrim's might be.[28]

Of the eighty-two women al-Sulamī memorializes in his *Dhikr al-niswa*, nine are presented as ascetic travellers, mostly for the purpose of *ḥajj* as well.[29] So the numbers are roughly congruent across gender at eleven percent of entries specifically identifying individuals travelling for ascetic or spiritual purposes.[30] The women al-Sulamī cites travelled alone, in pairs with female companions,[31] or sometimes with their husbands and children.[32] While by no means representing the majority of ascetics, these wanderers enjoyed some status in early Sufi writings as they are valorized for their spiritual dedication and ascetic persistence. Al-Sulamī describes these wanderers as practitioners of *tawakkul* (reliance upon God) and masters of ascetic self-denial.

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[28] It is interesting to note that Abū Saʿīd seems to have never completed a pilgrimage to Mecca, despite his many travels. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 61–62.
[29] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 98–99, 132–33, 142–1, 152–53, 226–27, 232–33, 240–41, 242–43, 250-1. For some discussion of pilgrimage as a site for female religious activity and authority, see Geissinger, "The Portrayal of the Hajj."
[30] In Ibn al-Jawzī's additions, three more of al-Sulamī's entries are later associated with travel and wandering. Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 274–75, 310–11, 320–21.
[31] Sulamī, 142–43, 240–41.
[32] Sulamī, 232–33.

3.2.2 Wandering women

Al-Sulamī offers very few details about the wanderings of ascetics in his biographical encyclopedias, preferring to simply indicate when an ascetic was known for travelling and sometimes attributing companions to them or identifying the cities they visited along the way.[33] However, al-Sulamī tells one story of a female wanderer by the name of Umm Kulthūm who spent time with a number of Nishapuri men, including ʿAbd Allāh b. Munāzil (d. 329/941), who was a disciple of the founder of Malāmatism Ḥamdūn al-Qaṣṣār (d. 271/884). Al-Sulamī depicts Umm Kulthūm wandering in the mountains with a female companion, Umm al-Ḥusayn al-Qurashiyya (d. ca. late fourth/tenth century).[34] While the two women were in the mountains, Umm Kulthūm experiences an overwhelming spiritual vision. In typical Malāmati fashion, she minimizes her spiritual experience by asking Umm al-Ḥusayn to take her back to the lowlands, saying "The vision of divine power nearly caused me to forget God the Powerful."[35] Umm Kulthūm thus reveals her wisdom and discernment by recognizing that even spiritual and visionary experiences can distract one from God. Al-Sulamī's depiction of this anecdote centers Umm Kulthūm's spiritual journey and recognizes her wisdom as a boon to her spiritual growth. However, in later authors' narrativized depictions of women wandering the wilderness, their spiritual subjectivity is minimized and their wisdom, if noted, is utilized for the benefit of their male counterparts rather than themselves.

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[33] Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, 227.
[34] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 224–25, 250–51.
[35] Sulamī, 240–41.

Al-Sulamī's presentation of these two women wandering the wilderness alone is intriguing given the stance of Shāfiʿī law as understood at the time on the impermissibility of women travelling without a male guardian. Marion Katz notes all four traditional Sunni schools of jurisprudence placed restrictions on women travelling alone. Al-Shāfiʿī's school in particular considered even the fulfillment of *ḥajj* for a Muslim woman to be predicated on her male kin's guardianship, although, without an available male guardian, women are permitted to travel in groups of trustworthy female companions according to Shāfiʿī jurisprudence.[36] While Umm Kulthūm here travels with a female companion, she is not on her way to Mecca for pilgrimage, indicating a willingness on the part of al-Sulamī to depict women beyond idealized *fiqh* rulings.

Al-Sulamī's relative disinterest in presenting his Sufi predecessors as perfectly in line with dominant *fiqh* interpretations of the time stands in contrast to al-Qushayrī. Al-Qushayrī writes his *Risāla* with *sharīʿa* in mind and makes clear his intention to align his Nishapuri Sufism with his iteration of orthodox Sunni Islam. Al-Qushayrī's determination to cast Sufis as orthodox Sunni Muslims, [37] which for him meant Muslims who uphold the laws and doctrines of Shafiite Islam, is seen most clearly in al-Qushayrī's choice to title the biographical section of the *Risāla*: *Fī dhikr mashāyikh hādhihi al-ṭarīqa wa mā yadil min sayrihim wa aqwālihim ʿalā taʿẓīm al-sharīʿa* (On the masters of this path and their deeds and sayings that show how they uphold the divine law).[38] Al-Qushayrī omitted al-Sulamī's female entries as well as that of the controversial mystic Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d.

[36] Katz, *Women in the Mosque*, 42–43. Shāfiʿī, *Kitāb Al-Umm*, 2:127-30.
[37] Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar*, 205–9.
[38] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 21; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 17.

309/922), thus excising anyone who might jeopardize al-Qushayrī's hopes of garnering orthodox status for Sufism in a highly volatile political environment.[39] Unlike al-Sulamī's comprehensive approach, al-Qushayrī sought a more cautious and highly selective approach to his inclusions. This may explain why al-Qushayrī presents female predecessors in more formulaic and less diverse circumstances than al-Sulamī.

3.2.3 The *ḥajj* as pretext for ascetic travel

Al-Sulamī notes a number of early Sufis travelled for the purpose of visiting Mecca. Some of the earliest female mystics and ascetics, including Fāṭima al-Naysabūriyya and Umm al-Ḥusayn al-Qurashiyya (the companion of Umm Kulthūm) were known for undertaking the route to Mecca multiple times in their lives.[40] The frequency of their travel indicates intentions beyond the fulfilling of the requirement of performing the pilgrimage incumbent upon every Muslim once in their lifetime and points to their financial capacity to undertake such journeys. The *ḥajj* offered some opportunity for the practice of *siyāḥa* in the early generations of ascetic and mystical practices prior to the rise of Sufism.[41] Marina Tolmecheva notes *ḥajj* trips functioned as a female practice of piety into the ninth/fifteenth century.[42] The continued use of *ḥajj* as a means by which women could travel for spiritual purposes indicates the role of journeying as an avenue for those marginalized from

[39] Malamud, "Sufi Organizations and Structures of Authority in Medieval Nishapur," 431; Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar*, 205–19; Mojaddedi, *The Biographical Tradition in Sufism: The Ṭabaqāt Genre from al-Sulamī to Jāmī*, 103–4.
[40] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 142–45, 250–51.
[41] Laury Silvers notes some instances of female groups gathering around the Ka'ba for ecstatic devotions. Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014, 33.
[42] Tolmacheva, "Female Piety and Patronage in the Medieval Hajj."

normative Sufi practice, particularly after the rise of urban centers as androcentric elite spaces of spiritual training.[43]

However, *ḥajj* is considered obligatory for those who have the means, while *siyāḥa* is not. Al-Sulamī's records seem to depict a number of women travelling for non-obligatory spiritual practices, such as for supplemental *ḥajj* beyond the ritual requirement and to cultivate ascetic virtues as well as to meet with other ascetics and mystics in different cities. The decline in representations of such practices for both men and women and the heavy narrativization of non-elite men and women in later records indicates increased resistance to practices of ascetic wandering just as urban centers of Sufi practice were being established.

3.2.4 Early resistance and the gradual decline of practices of *siyāḥa*

Despite the prevalence of ascetic wandering in the early period, some early Sufi writers were reluctant to recommend the practice. Al-Sarrāj describes *siyāḥa* as a practice that, if undertaken, should not involve any aimless wandering.

> It is not their custom (*ādābihim*) to travel, wandering aimlessly (*dawarān*), nor to look upon the land and seek sustenance (*rizq*). Rather, they travel to perform *ḥajj* and to exert themselves (*jihād*),[44] to meet masters, to visit kin, to respond to injustices (*maẓālim*), seek knowledge and to meet those who might benefit them somehow in the knowledge of their states, or to visit a place with virtue and honor. They never leave behind the manners or litanies (*awrād*) that they undertook in the settled areas (*ḥadr*), and they do not shorten prayers … .[45]

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[43] For some indications of how Mecca and travelling for pilgrimage acted as sites for less restrictive religious and intellectual engagement for Muslim women, see Geissinger, "The Portrayal of the Hajj," 164–65, 171, 174–75. For one account of a mystic woman who travelled to Mecca for the purpose of study, and the economic privileges that allowed her such opportunities, see Azad, "Female Mystics in Medieval Islam: The Quiet Legacy," 71–73.

[44] In this case, *jihād* may indicate both to fight for the cause of Islam, including travelling to *ribats* on the frontiers to protect the borderlands of the Islamic empire, as well as striving towards cultivating oneself through wandering the desert. The context is unclear in the original Arabic.

[45] Sarrāj, *Luma ʿ*, 190.

Al-Sarrāj's insistence that no wandering should be undertaken without an explicit destination or purpose indicates some practices were deemed superfluous and ongoing discomfort regarding the appropriateness of *siyāḥa* as a religious practice. The uneasiness with practices of *siyāḥa* continued into the fifth/eleventh century with al-Qushayrī and his contemporaries. Salamah-Qudsi writes,

> It appears that certain Sufis of Qushayrī's time and prior to it were accused of neglecting religious duties while travelling frequently. In Qushayrī's view, true Sufis are committed to worship during their roving, as 'dispensations (*rukhaṣ*) are allowed only to those whose travel is mandatory, while Sufis' travel is optional.'[46]

Thus, al-Sarrāj's extensive list of the various acceptable goals of wandering and al-Qushayrī's insistence that one's duties as a Muslim are not to be neglected while travelling present us with early iterations of resistance to practices of wandering the wilderness and some indications of the specific criticisms against *siyāḥa*. Salamah-Qudsi argues that both al-Sarrāj and al-Qushayrī's criticisms of *siyāḥa* demonstrate a growing interest in cementing communal roles and bonds amongst Sufis.[47] An increased focus on one's communal responsibilities precluded travel beyond the normative boundaries of urban social identity.

Al-Qushayrī explicitly criticizes the practice of *siyāḥa* by narrating teachings from his father-in-law Abū ʿAlī al-Daqqāq and from Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sūsī that advocate for

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[46] Salamah-Qudsi, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety*, 2018, 145. The jurisprudence around *rukhaṣ* (dispensations) in al-Qushayrī's time and until today in the Shafiite school includes allowances to shorten prayer and postpone fasting while travelling. However, when travelling is undertaken superfluously according to religious law, there seems to have been debate as to whether or not these dispensations stand. Al-Shāfiʿī displays cautiousness by stating that dispensations should not be abused. Shāfiʿī, *Kitāb Al-Umm*, 1:99. The practical boundaries of their usage has been subject to different interpretations.

[47] Salamah-Qudsi, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety*, 2018, 136–37.

settled, communal life.[48] On behalf of Abū ʿAlī al-Daqqāq, he writes, "A man came to me and said: 'I have come to you from far away.' I told him: 'This matter is obtained neither by crossing great distances nor by subjecting oneself to the strictures of travel. Separate from your soul even by a single step, and you will achieve your goal.'"[49] Here, al-Daqqāq undermines al-Sarrāj's encouragement of travelling in search of knowledgeable masters. Al-Qushayrī further remarks on the practice of seclusion (*ʿuzla*), "Its purpose is to turn [bad] qualities into [good] ones, not to withdraw from familiar places [into the desert]."[50] In another anecdote, al-Qushayrī diminishes the spiritual attainments of the famous wanderer Ibrahīm b. al-Khawwāṣ, writing,

> Al-Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr said to Ibrahīm al-Khawwāṣ: "What have you achieved throughout all these travels of yours and your wanderings in the deserts?" He answered: "I have persevered in my trust in God, disciplining my soul thereby," Al-Ḥusayn asked him: "So you have spent your entire life taking care of your inner self. What about annihilating your inner self by unifying it with God?"[51]

Al-Qushayrī further reduces the benefits of *siyāḥa* in his chapter on travel, indicating that, while many Sufis of his time recommend the practice, ultimately it is traversing with the heart, not the body, that is of true consequence to the Sufi Path. [52]

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[48] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 138–39; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 123–24.
[49] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 138–39; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 123. Abū Saʿīd notes that, in addition to the *madrasa* Abū ʿAlī al-Daqqāq founded in Nishapur he also founded a *khānaqāh* in Nasā. Nicholson, *Studies In Islamic Mysticism*, 19. Al-Qushayrī's choice of the term madrasa to designate the institution his father-in-law founded and Abū Saʿīd's use of *khānaqāh* indicates al-Qushayrī's allegiance to his family's Arab tribal ties and the "Persian character" of Abū Saʿīd's approach. For al-Qushayrī's Arab lineage, see Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar*, 25–32. For Abū Saʿīd, Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 76. Al-Qushayrī's loyalty to Arab over Persian culture is bound up in his anti-Karrāmi stance as well as his devotion to marrying the Shāfiʿī school to Sufism.
[50] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 138; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 122.
[51] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 202; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 180.
[52] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 321; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 297.

A few decades later, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) recapitulates al-Qushayrī's distinction between travel with the body and the heart, adding, "Inner journeying (*al-safar al-bāṭin*) is the more noble of these two types of travel."[53] His critique is particularly noteworthy given al-Ghazālī's autobiographical depiction of his abandonment of his family for a period of ten years to wander in search of spiritual cultivation.[54] Yet, despite his personal choices, al-Ghazālī advocates for urban seclusion (*ʿuzla, khalwa*) over ascetic travel.[55] Similarly, Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Hujwīrī (d. 465/1072) separates dervishes into two categories, "residents" and "travelers," and presents dervishes who travel as inferior to those who settle.[56] The increased proclivity towards urban settlement and the consequent emergence of practices of seclusion in the body of the collective in Sufi writings of the fifth/eleventh century points to the role of the urbanization of Sufism in the diminishment of individual ascetic practices.

3.2.5 Collective seclusion (*khalwa*)

Criticism of *siyāḥa* increased in the period during which fixed Sufi spaces of practices proliferated in the form of *khānaqāhs*, *ribāṭs and zāwiyas*. While Sufis held teaching circles and chanting sessions in mosques and the homes of masters prior to the fifth/eleventh century, the construction of purpose-driven Sufi spaces transformed Sufism by establishing fixed urban settings for Sufi rituals. In constructing Sufi-dedicated spaces, many built individual cells into the body of the *khānaqāh* to host Sufi aspirants practicing

[53] Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn*, 2:244.
[54] Watt, *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali*, 68.
[55] Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn*, 2:239.
[56] Hujwīrī, *The Kashf al-Mahjúb, the Oldest Persian Treatise on Súfiism*, 340.

seclusion while keeping them within the bounds of the larger collective. Al-Sulamī's entry for one Basran woman called Shabaka indicates she had built underground seclusion chambers beneath her home for her female disciples.[57] Al-Sulamī's specification of Shabaka's female disciples indicates some level of gender segregation in the domestic space in Shabaka's context. However, we also receive reports of Abū Saʿīd secluding himself in a dedicated niche in his house in the early stages of his asceticism.[58] Thus, Shabaka's choice to utilize these specialized spaces for ascetic practices for women underneath her home indicates both a creative use of domestic space for spiritual devotions as well as early historical evidence that domestic spaces served as sites of Sufi practice prior to the proliferation of *khānaqāhs*. Thus, for some of these early Sufi figures domestic space was not fully private nor public but functioned as an in-between space that served different functions at different times. Moving such seclusion chambers from domestic sites to institutional sites emphasizes the emergence of communal institutional identity beyond the domestic node. Communal institutional spaces, constructed in urban centers for elite male access, also reduced the mobile and fluid nature of Sufi spaces. By isolating male dervishes inside the Sufi lodge, elite men were granted a pocket of solitude contained within the collective body of the *khānaqāh*.[59]

Given the accessibility of urban space to elite men and the centering of elite male subjectivity in Sufi discourses of belief and practice, *khalwa* as collective seclusion replaces *siyāḥa* as the dominant ascetic practice of departing from society (*ʿuzla*) during

[57] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 90–91.
[58] Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 8.
[59] Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 175, 314–15.

and after the fifth/eleventh century. In this way, the internalization of asceticism discussed in Chapter Two is mirrored in an internalization of Sufism through settlement indoors in dedicated urban institutions. This movement indoors further separated urban Sufis from the rural Karrāmis and also created a new collective sphere of Sufism that excluded women, enslaved individuals, and other non-elite actors. Because the Karrāmis resided in the northwestern corner of Nishapur while these institutions were being established in areas populated by the religious and patrician elite towards the south of the city, Nishapuri Sufis were able to establish spaces of practices that excluded those whose social circumstances and status differed from their own.

The localization of practices of seclusion in urban spaces contributed to the increased androcentrism of Sufism. For those who could not participate in the closed quarters of elite male city life, their ascetic practices remained in domestic or rural spaces. The following section explores the rise of urban sites of Sufi practice and the development of rituals centered on the male body as a development with deeply gendered consequences. The move from *siyāḥa* to *khalwa* mirrors the inward turn and indicates the multiple concentric levels of interiorization Sufism underwent from the hinterlands to the cities, from the city to the *khānaqāh*, and from the *khānaqāh* to inscription upon the male physical body.

3.2.6 The rise of the *khānaqāh*

The historical origin of Sufi lodges is unknown. Given the proliferation of a number of different terms for a Sufi lodge, including *khānaqāh*, *ribāṭ*, *zāwiya*, *duwayra*, *tekke* and *dargah*, it seems that different institutions that came to be attributed to Sufi orders developed in tandem in a number of diverse locations. Each of these institutions was

tailored to the religious, cultural, and social purposes of its founders. In her study of the rise of *ribāṭs*, Daphna Ephrat indicates that these particular Sufi institutions emerged in the Arab regions of the Islamic empire and originated as fortresses on the frontiers that tended to traveling soldiers and ascetics in the borderlands of the Islamic Empire in second/eighth-century Syria and Palestine.[60] *Khānaqāhs* and *duwayras* are attributed to Khurasani origins beginning in the fourth/tenth century with Jacqueline Chabbi arguing that *khānaqāhs* derived from Karrāmi establishments based on evidence in Shams al-Dīn al-Muqaddasī's (d. c. 4th/10th century) writings.[61] The *zāwiya* proliferated in North Africa from about the seventh/thirteenth century onwards.[62] The *tekke* became a popular term for Sufi institutions in the Ottoman period.[63]

Initially, there seems to have been some variation in the functions of these different institutions. The *zawiya*, Ephrat writes, began as a "corner" in a mosque and then evolved into modest institutions built around the presence of a charismatic *shaykh*—in contradistinction to *khānaqāhs* which were founded through royal endowments.[64] *Ribāṭs* and mosques acted as communal centers and therefore came equipped with kitchens serving the poor and rooms for guests and travellers. Ultimately, these diverse functions overlapped in different spaces and the names of Sufi institutions became largely interchangeable.

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[60] Ephrat, "The Shaykh, the Physical Setting and the Holy Site," 12-13.
[61] Chabbi, "Kẖānḳāh."
[62] S. Blair, Katz, and Hamès, "Zāwiya."
[63] Clayer, "Tekke."
[64] Ephrat, "The Shaykh, the Physical Setting and the Holy Site," 10.

Chabbi's assertion that the *khānaqāh*s in Nishapur were modelled upon Karrāmi lodges offers new insight into the writings of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī. The absence of the term *khānaqāh* from both these authors' writings may support a Karrāmi origin and explain the deliberate exclusion of a term associated with the Karrāmis. Al-Sulamī inherited a *duwayra* from his grandfather Ibn Nujayd and al-Qushayrī inherited a *madrasa* from Abū ʿAlī al-Daqqāq. Both were heavily involved in directing students in physical Sufi institutions. Yet neither uses the term *khānaqāh* nor addresses it in their writings. When discussing Sufi spaces, al-Qushayrī uses the term *ribāṭ* and *madrasa* rather than *khānaqā*, which indicates a strict allegiance to Arab societal modes.[65] There is one instance in which al-Qushayrī utilizes the term *khānaqāh*, when he quotes Abū Turāb al-Nakhshabī directly saying, "One who sits in his *khānaqāh* or mosque is a beggar."[66] This indicates the term was in use in al-Qushayrī's time but that he personally did not prefer it as a designation of a Sufi space. A few decades later, al-Ghazali freely uses the term *khānaqāh*, which indicates that al-Qushayrī's Karrāmi antipathy did not continue to occupy the minds of his Sufi successors even while the gendered effects of it persisted.

Abū Saʿīd b. Abū al-Khayr, a contemporary and companion of al-Qushayrī, is memorialized by his descendants as having visited, directed and founded a number of *khānaqāhs*.[67] Abū Saʿīd b. Abū al-Khayr also authored a text delineating codes of conduct to be observed within the *khānaqāh*.[68] Given their contemporary status, it seems likely that

[65] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 39, 152, 270, 328; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 33, 135, 247, 305.
[66] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 46; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 40.
[67] Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 12, 34, 57, 74–75.
[68] Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 46; Chabbi, "Ḵẖānḳāh"; Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 243.

al-Qushayrī resisted the term because of its Karrāmi influence. Al-Fārisī, too, uses the term *khānaqāh* freely.[69] This may indicate that the term became less associated with the Karrāmis after al-Qushayrī—two generations after the height of Karrāmi opposition.

While mutable and fluid sites of Sufi teaching and praxis were the norm in the early period, some teachers had permanent institutional spaces dedicated solely to Sufi teaching sessions that did not occur in mosques or homes. Al-Qushayrī recalls visiting al-Sulamī's library, part of the *duwayra* he inherited from his maternal grandfather, to procure a text authored by Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922).[70] In later records, including al-Fārisī's *Tarīkh Naysabūr*, al-Sulamī's *duwayra* is remembered as a *khānaqāh* that was small but drew many notable Sufis and scholars to it, including al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071).[71] Al-Qushayrī, having inherited al-Daqqāq's circle, was considered the head of the *madrasa* and seems to have passed the leadership of the space on to a small group of male disciples.[72] The parallel existence of both al-Sulamī's *khānaqāh* and al-Daqqāq's (later al-Qushayrī's) *madrasa*, indicates the emergence of institutionalized sites of Sufi praxis in the period immediately prior to the fifth/eleventh century. When *khānaqāhs* began to proliferate in Nishapur, there was a clear decline in records of the practice of *siyāḥa*.

Additionally, there are minimal indications of female participation in these Nishapuri *khānaqāhs* once they became commonplace, despite al-Sulamī's records of the

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[69] Fārisī and Ṣarfīnī, *Al-Muntakhab min al-Siyāq li-Tārīkh Naysābūr*, #150, #205, #556, #765; Fārisī, Khalīfa al-Nisabūrī, and Ṣarīfīnī, *The Histories of Nishapur*, #1531.
[70] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 270; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 247; Ernst, *Hallaj: Poems of a Sufi Martyr*, 1–3.
[71] Maḥmūd, *Manāhij al-Mufassirīn*, 75; Fārisī and Ṣarfīnī, *Al-Muntakhab min al-Siyāq li-Tārīkh Naysābūr*, #205.
[72] Fārisī and Ṣarfīnī, *Al-Muntakhab min al-Siyāq li-Tārīkh Naysābūr*, #1567, #1616.

presence of women in mosques or at the homes of early Sufis where early mystical teachings were being disseminated. The exception to this is Abū Saʿīd's *khānaqāh* in Nishapur if we take the story of Īshī Nīllī as historical evidence. In that anecdote, once Īshī Nīllī decides to devote herself to Abū Saʿīd as a student, he directs her to his wife to receive a *khirqa*—the cloak with which Sufis recognize their students and vest them with authority.[73] This anecdote indicates that some women were present in the *khānaqāhs* but seem to have conducted their own spiritual affairs such that male and female Sufis practiced Sufism separately. Despite such evidence of female presence in the *khānaqāh*, male dervishes are still centered both in the institutional space and in the anecdotes told about the Sufis of Nishapur. The result of gender segregation in physical spaces is a centering of male activities through male-authored writings while relegating women's Sufi devotions to female-led spaces that are largely absent from historical narrative.

As Sufi institutions became more formalized, less and less access seems to have been offered to non-elite women. As seen above, elite women achieved access either through their influence or via their elite male relatives.[74] While there is some historical evidence that men were instructed to "prevent women from mixing with men in learned assemblies" under the Seljuks, [75] women whose male family members were well-known teachers, such as those of the Daqqāq lineage, received lessons and teachings from their

[73] Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 69–70.
[74] Bulliet, "Women and the Urban Religious Elite," 75–78. Richard Bulliet argues that despite female elite access to education, women could not overcome gender segregation as an obstacle to authority and recognition. Bulliet, 77. Asma Sayeed argues, in contrast to Bulliet, that the elite women with ties to scholarly kindship networks were able to at least partially overcome the hinderance of gender segregation as cultural mores. Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam*, 2013, 114.
[75] Meisami, "Eleventh-Century Women: Evidence from Bayhaqi's History," 82.

male kin even while other men wanted to ban them from public teaching sessions. This limited female access to institutional education allowed only elite women with kinship ties to attend sessions, enter institutions of learning in Khurasan, and interact with male Sufis.

3.2.7 The congregational mosque: a comparative analysis

Riaz Hassan highlights the role of the *jāmiʿ*, the congregational mosque where Muslims gather on Fridays for their weekly communal prayer, in shifting Arab and Islamicate civilization from nomadic social systems to sedentary cities.[76] The requirement of a central space in which to congregate with a minimum of forty (male) individuals had the de facto impact of establishing settled life in first/seventh-century Arabia. The role of physical institutional spaces of congregation in propagating a fast-growing and expansive civilization in a relatively limited amount of time indicates the significance of physical space in the establishment of movements with lasting power.

Paul Wheatley also emphasizes the effect of a grand congregational mosque on transforming the urban fabric of a Muslim community. He describes how the orientation of the mosque towards the direction of prayer in Mecca (*qibla*) impacts surrounding structures and thus determines urban spatial morphology.[77] The centrality of the mosque goes beyond its physical location (usually at the center of dense, urban areas) or its function as the site of obligatory religious rituals. The mosque became the center of elite male communal and intellectual life as, between prayers, a number of teaching circles would

[76] Hassan, "Islam and Urbanization in the Medieval Middle-East," 109. Paul Wheatley similarly argues that the congregational mosque made the Islamic city and perpetuated the urban basis of Islam as a religious tradition. Wheatley, "Levels of Space Awareness in the Traditional Islamic City," 358–59.
[77] Wheatley, *The Places Where Men Pray Together*, 278.

offer lessons on a variety of subjects including Qur'anic recitation, ḥadīth and mystical teachings. Al-Qushayrī describes such circles taking place in proximity to each other, including the circles of Junayd (d. 298/910) and al-Shiblī (d. 334/946).[78]

In the realm of institutionalized Sufism, the development of the *khānaqāh* system had a similar effect of centering elite male individuals in dense, communal patterns. While the *khānaqāh* did not necessarily create cities as in the case of the congregational mosque, it created urban Sufi identity. The figure of the ascetic leaving city life and its material attachments to roam nomadically thus morphed into the image of the recluse shut away in an urban cell next to where his Sufi brethren congregated. The urbanization of Sufism in the fifth/eleventh century, like the urbanization of Islam through settlement around mosques, had the effect of solidifying and prioritizing a particularly exclusive collective religious identity.

Al-Qushayrī begins his advice to novices at the end of his *Risāla* by foregrounding the critical role of spiritual masters in upholding true Sufism and praising the teaching circles (*ḥalaqas*) of famous Sufis such as al-Junayd and al-Shiblī. He reminds novices to attach themselves to these teachers and avoid interacting with those outside the community (*ṭāʾifa*).[79] The physical site of Sufi practice and teaching in the second/eighth and third/ninth century were these informal teaching circles modeled by Junayd and his contemporaries. These circles evolved into the *zāwiyas* and *khānaqāhs* of the fifth/eleventh century. Al-Qushayrī highlights these teaching circles as spaces where the community

[78] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 425–26; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 404.
[79] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 426; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 404–5.

practices and around which an invisible social boundary exists separating Sufi practitioners from others. He thus emphasizes the physical space around a spiritual master as the center of normative Sufi praxis and education. That al-Qushayrī distinguishes those in the "circle" from those not on the "path" indicates how the delineation of physical space acts as a significant marker of identity in the formative period of Sufism. The development of physical walls erected around these teaching circles indicates the level of inviolability woven around normative Sufi identity.

Al-Qushayrī's use of the term "path" *(ṭarīqa*) to explain the work undertaken in these teaching circles offers an apt illustration of the narrowing in of the normative bounds of Sufism. The paths through the hinterlands that once required the help of Bedouins to navigate became internalized as metaphorical paths through the microcosmic self. *Siyāḥa*, traversing the wilderness, became *sulūk*, traversing the spiritual path. The new guides of the inner path were no longer desert Bedouins, but the elite, urban, educated men who represented the interests of similarly elite urban men. Thus, the circle of Sufis surrounding male masters became the boundaries that mediated and limited the access of non-elites, who were now relegated to the domestic, rural, and exurban spaces beyond the walls of the *khānaqā*.

The role of royal endowments and patronage in the creation of dedicated Sufi spaces necessitated a strict distinction between members and outsiders as well as clear delineations of teachings and practice in the same ways the schools of law necessitated such organization. As patronage, ritual, and identity became solidified in these spaces, exclusion intensified. Wheatley writes of the development of gendered boundaries in congregational mosques,

> It is inevitable that, as the sanctity of the mosque increased, its exclusivity became an issue. Ibn al-Ḥajj would have preferred to deny access to women (citing ʿAʾishah as his authority), but from early times they were tolerated within the mosque, usually in specially reserved sections and, according to some traditionists, unperfumed. Under the early Umayyads, Christians were still permitted to enter a mosque. Later the Ahl al-Kitāb retained that right but not polytheists, and finally the privilege became restricted to Muslims with Ibn al-Ḥajj going so far as to recommend that Christian monks who wove mats for a mosque be prohibited from laying them.[80]

Wheatley's presentation of increasingly stringent boundaries around the congregational mosque is echoed in the research of Marion Katz. Katz argues that mosque membership and usage has always been dynamic and therefore misogynist trends did not always win out.[81] At the same time, Katz notes a general trajectory of increasingly restrictive limitations on mosque attendance for women over time.[82] She attributes this increased restrictiveness to more elaborate discourses of *fitna* being conflated with the sexual temptations ascribed to the presence of women.[83] As gendered discourses developed around the use of public spaces deemed sacred such as the congregational mosques, boundaries became less permeable and more restrictive.

A similar pattern is discernable in comparing al-Sulamī's description of sites of Sufi congregation and al-Fārisī's records of schools and Sufi lodges a couple of generations later. Al-Sulamī describes al-Wahaṭiyya, Umm al-Ḥusayn al-Qurashiyya, ʿAzīza al-Harawiyya and others attending and hosting early teaching circles not bound in any particular place, but rather in flexible, movable sites ranging from the domestic to the exurban. Contrastingly, al-Fārisī makes note of some male attendants at his grandmother

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[80] Wheatley, *The Places Where Men Pray Together*, 236.
[81] Katz, *Women in the Mosque*, 4, 7.
[82] Katz, 2, 51–52.
[83] Katz, 3, 24–26, 34–36, 73–76.

Fāṭima al-Daqqāqiyya's circles in the fixed space of her father's school but describes all the other women of Nishapur as relegated to Sufi practice in solitary modes at home. The development of communal urban Sufism increasingly became the reserve of men and male youths, with a few women who were fortunate to share kinship ties to male leaders of such spaces or local influence being granted limited access to these fixed spaces.

3.2.8 Inscribing authority on male bodies

In such almost exclusively homosocial elite male spaces, rituals of transmission and succession developed that were inscribed upon male bodies. These rituals of transmission formalized Sufism as a tradition that could be inherited over generations but limited these chains of succession to male disciples. Bashir notes that male bodies were sites of social solidarity and the limitation of women's access prevented them from occupying authoritative positions in Sufi lineages.[84] Physical and spiritual bonds between master and aspirant were formalized through *bayʿa*, vows of obedience and allegiance sealed through the clasping of hands and other forms of physical contact.[85] Such rituals excluded women and non-elites in a number of ways. Cross-gender physical contact constituted a social taboo. The division of Islamicate cities into homogenous closed quarters was regulated by gates and guards that maintained the cohesion of ethnic and religious groups.[86] While class may not have been as distinct a barrier for men to access Sufi institutional spaces,[87] class became a barrier for women, as well as for enslaved

[84] Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 21–22.
[85] For an analysis of the role of physical contact and hand-clasping in particular in the establishment of social solidarity through corporeal contact, see Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 1–8.
[86] Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 85–87.
[87] Some examples of the range of classes from which male aspirants came in Abū Saʿīd's *khānaqāh* can be found here: Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, 69–75. By comparison, the only women mentioned as

individuals, who were excluded given their inability to attend gatherings in Sufi spaces for extended periods of time due to their accountability to their masters.[88]

Some ways in which class impacted women differently includes the distance beyond the domestic node that a woman could travel in accordance with social mores. Paul Wheatley describes nodes as areas where the "frequency of spatial experience was high," which for most individuals included their homes, adjacent courtyards and immediate neighborhoods, with the boundary of one's quarter indicating the limit of one's daily scope of mobility.[89] Elite women's mobility was typically limited to their family dwellings, as they did not work outside the home. [90] Lower class women who earned their livelihood through weaving or other trades could move around in neighboring quarters as per their work requirements. Enslaved women were not subject to the same seclusion laws or veiling norms as their mistresses and thus their degree of mobility was mainly determined by the wishes of their owners. Finally, the mobility of the lowest class of women, comprised of the homeless, rural immigrants and Bedouins, those whose work was considered unsavory including those who prepared corpses for burial as well as entertainers and prostitutes, extended far beyond their nodes. They could roam freely in the streets but were not admitted into the institutions of the elite.[91] In this way, women faced different obstacles to institutional access based on a number of factors including class, the designation of space

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followers of Abū Saʿīd are his wife, the mother of a well-known Sufi and the elite Nishapuri woman, Īshī Nīllī. All three women had privileged access due to kinship ties or local influence. Nicholson, 15, 44, 69.

[88] Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 79–81. Katz argues similarly for enslaved women who had little agency to attend rituals and activities at congregational mosques, see Katz, *Women in the Mosque*, 104.

[89] Wheatley, "Levels of Space Awareness in the Traditional Islamic City," 354.

[90] Wheatley, 355.

[91] Wheatley, 354–56.

by elite male authorities, and developing discourses around these spaces. The exurban grounds upon which early proto-Sufis practiced their asceticism allowed some degree of access due to the lack of regulation of mystical and ascetic behavior. The settling of Sufism into elite, urban spaces with physical walls contributed to the regulation and exclusionary nature of medieval Sufism.

To illustrate the gendering of physical space in Sufism, we can analyze a tale al-Qushayrī tells of a gathering of early Sufis. In this anecdote, a man coded as a practitioner of Sufi chivalry (*futuwwa*) is outraged at the presence of an enslaved girl at the gathering that he attends with other men. However, he is shown up by another man, who indicates that he had never noticed the gender of the enslaved girl despite visiting this location for years. The different responses of each of the men indicate, firstly, that elite men idealized a world in which enslaved women and girls would be absent from such gatherings (hence the surprise and outrage cast in the voice of the Nishapuri individual) and, secondly, that the spiritual ideal is, yet again, to be above the recognition of any girl or woman in one's presence. The spiritual ideal of ignoring any female in the vicinity, also addressed in Chapter Two, offers at best an invisible role to female bodies in Sufi gathering spaces while making male membership normative and exclusive. The Nishapuri individual does not erase the person of the enslaved girl, but rather her gender. In serving the men, she exists in the space but does not participate in the communal rites of it. Al-Qushayrī narrates,

> It is said that a man who had made claims of chivalry traveled from Nishapur to Nasa, where someone invited him for a meal along with a group of chivalrous young men. When they had finished their feast, a slave girl came to pour water for them to wash their hands. The man from Nishapur retracted his hands, saying: "It is not allowed by the code of chivalry for a girl to pour water for men!" One of those present remarked: "I have come to

this house for many years, yet I have never taken any notice of whether it was a man or a woman who poured water for us to wash our hands!"[92]

This anecdote idealizes a particular social hierarchy in which elite men, young and old, who participated in the collective identity of *futuwwa* were expected to gather in spaces temporarily gendered specifically for their exclusive use. While the space indicated here seems to be domestic, it is rendered a male space by those in it for the duration of the meal that is shared amongst them. The presence of a female individual is an affront for one of the men and invisible to the other—centering elite men in the space in both cases. Mazumdar and Mazumdar argue for the transiency of spatial classification as public or private depending on the individuals and the activities performed within it at any given time.[93] Al-Qushayrī's depiction of domestic space in the early period of Sufism follows this model, although he presents these spaces as subject to the presence and purposes of elite men specifically. Thus, when Sufism is housed within the *khānaqāh* and not primarily in the domestic nodes of notable Sufi men, urban institutional space becomes more statically androcentric. The lack of overlap with domestic space as well as the undertaking of activities not considered obligatory upon every Muslim individual meant women and non-elite men did not have to be considered in elite male use of space, as they would have been in the case of *ḥajj* where their presence is at least theoretically prescribed by Islamic law.

Addressing women's limited access to institutionalized Sufism in the early modern period, Shahzad Bashir describes the development of Sufi lineages as a movement that

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[92] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 264; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 240.
[93] Mazumdar and Mazumdar, "Rethinking Public and Private Space." Marion Katz, too, argues "the gendered allocation of space was not static, but temporally varied." Katz, *Women in the Mosque*, 7.

found continuance through "the physical touch of hands," which centered the male body as a mediating "vehicle of social solidarity."[94] He writes,

> …a more significant element in women's systematic lack of access to this world was that they could not activate intimacies with male Sufis that required unrestricted corporeal contact. … The corporeal restriction disallowed them from acting as stand-ins and successors to famous male masters, thereby denying them the possibility of becoming prominent nodes in the major lineages.[95]

The construction of dedicated sites for Sufi practice established a communal body that was primarily located in urban spaces. These spaces privileged elite, male bodies—which allowed for the evolution of rites of initiation and transmission mediated through male physicality. The limitations imposed on women in such circumstances by physical contact allowed institutional access only to the wives, sisters and daughters of the men who served as masters in these spaces. These elite women are prominently featured in al-Fārisī's biographies, while the non-elite women of al-Sulamī's writings fade into the margins of written Sufi history.[96]

3.3 Narrativizing *siyāḥa* and mechanisms of othering

Sufi literature diminishes female participation in ascetic wandering in a number of ways. In verse 66:5 of the Qur'an, we find the term *sāʾiḥāt* (female wanderers), coming from the same root as *siyāḥa*. While the Nishapuri authors do not comment on this term in the Qur'anic commentaries, Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī (d. 1127/1725) notes that it refers to women

[94] Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 6, 22.
[95] Bashir, 21–22.
[96] Bulliet notes the prevalence of kindship as the means by which women could access religious education in Nishapur. He argues, even with such privileged access, few women participated in the activities in these educational and religious institutions. Bulliet, "Women and the Urban Religious Elite," 75–76.

who fast, and secondarily indicates it means travelling but only applies to the initial migration from Mecca to Medina in Muḥammad's time. He writes, "There is no *siyāḥa* in the community of Muḥammad except for the *hijra* (the migration to Medina). And *siyāḥa* in the (Arabic) language means wandering the earth." [97] Ibn ʿAjība reproduces Ḥaqqī's interpretation of this verse. The strong opposition to *siyāḥa* in both these interpretations indicates early modern resistance to the practice of *siyāḥa*. Interestingly, both exegetes allow for *siyāḥa* to mean wandering in the context of male *sāʾiḥūn* in commentaries on verse 9:112. In Ibn ʿAjība's interpretation of Q9:112 where the masculine plural *sāʾiḥūn* is used in a very similar way to *sāʾiḥāt* in Q66:5, he allows for interpretations of the word to mean those who travel for *jihād*, to seek knowledge or to increase one's connections to masters and brethren. The gendered limitation on travelling women and allowance for travelling men takes al-Sarrāj's description of purposeful travel and extends it to male Sufis alone. Al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī both interpret Q9:112 as travelling, although al-Qushayrī draws attention away from literal wandering to metaphorical wandering with the heart in search of God. The varied attitudes to the notion of travel in the Qur'an presented here indicates the extent to which *siyāḥa* fell out of favor in Sufi circles during and after al-Qushayrī's lifetime.

3.3.1 Inscribing male subjectivity and authority in narrative hagiography

While *siyāḥa* as an ascetic practice declined as emphasis on communal gathering became normative, al-Qushayrī continued making use of a large number of stories about travelling Sufis to illustrate spiritual lessons. These stories took on more miraculous and

[97] Ḥaqqī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān*, Q66:5.

fantastical elements with the passage of time, which further placed *siyāḥa* outside the norm of daily life for Sufis. Sufi authors cast all non-elites and particularly women and non-Muslim men in these stories as trickster characters, that is characters who invert social hierarchy to gain the upper hand long enough to teach an elite male protagonist a spiritual lesson. By placing *siyāḥa* and miraculous encounters with social inferiors in the realm of spiritual fantasy, male authors centered elite male subjectivity while diminishing the role of non-elite members of society to that of props for the betterment of elite men.

The notion of encountering something of the divine in the wilderness and extracting a valuable spiritual lesson from the experience was a common trope in Sufi literature from the earliest period.[98] However, their popularity grew exponentially with al-Qushayrī. Some of these stories in the wilderness that involve women are attributed to Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya in Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār's *Tadhkirat al-awliyāʾ*.[99] Most are attributed to anonymized women, enslaved individuals, non-Muslims and racialized men and girls. The travellers in these later narratives are almost exclusively elite Arab or Persian Sufi men. Women and non-elite individuals are often portrayed as strange dwellers in these liminal spaces. Despite the early example of Umm Kulthūm, Sufi women are rarely depicted wandering the wilderness and gaining wisdom after al-Sulamī. Instead, the women depicted in the wilderness are no longer the spiritual subject of the story, but a narrative device through which a spiritual paradox or meaningful lesson is delivered to the elite male protagonist and/or reader. The disparity in the social position of the elite, male protagonist and the woman/non-elite man

[98] For a thorough discussion of trickster figures in the Hebrew Bible, see Nicholas, *The Trickster Revisited*. Also, Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*.
[99] ʿAṭṭār, *Memorial of God's Friends*, 99–100.

is often highlighted to make the deliverance of spiritual insight that much more powerful, given its unlikely source.

The fact that male authors cast women, non-elite men, enslaved and racialized individuals, and non-Muslims in these roles further amplifies elite, male subjectivity and perpetuates the expectation that non-elites were ordinarily expected to be bereft of spiritual education or attainment. Analyzing narratives of *siyāḥa* in writings after al-Sulamī reveals women and non-elite individuals undergoing a process of anonymization and narrativization at the hands of male authors.

3.3.2 Tricksters in the desert: *Siyāḥa* as a metaphor for sudden spiritual transformation

Most of the women in narrativized tales of *siyāḥa* remain unnamed in the tales told by Sufi men.[100] Al-Qushayrī, Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, Rashīd al-Dīn Maybūdī, and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī amongst others regularly depict strange, usually old, often anonymous women who show up to chastise or deliver a spiritual lesson to a Sufi man and then proceed to disappear without a trace.[101] These tales often take place in liminal exurban spaces and depict a sudden reversal of power designed to humble the male protagonist before someone who, under normal circumstances would be deemed inferior to him. These narrative anecdotes display a lot of parallels with trickster tales, particularly as these inferior "others" act as momentary "situation-inverters" that remind their male interlocutors of the idealized

[100] Silvers notes: "These women's names were not just dropped from biographical collections: a number of transmitters also edited women's stories to shift a male Sufi to the center of the narrative and pushed a now unknown woman to the margins to play a supporting role." Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014, 36n14.
[101] For example, Tustarī, *Tafsīr Al-Tustarī*, 2002, Q104:6. Maybudī, *Kashf al-Asrār*, Q49:10.

spiritual manhood they should be striving towards and of which they seem to be (momentarily) falling short.[102] Sufi trickster tales rely primarily on an individual who represents a deviation from the elite, male default to deliver, by way of paradoxically elite masculine acts of aggression and wisdom teachings, a reminder to both the male protagonist and the audience/reader that things are not what they seem while simultaneously reinforcing how things should ideally be in a social patriarchy.

In many of these trickster tales, a well-known Sufi man approaches a woman either to perform an act of chivalry or to criticize her for flaunting social norms (such as being abrasively loud or acting out in public).[103] The woman in response suddenly reveals extreme spiritual power and/or experiential wisdom, revealing the man's insincerity or incorrect perception of things. She then conveys to him a deeper mystical reality that undermines the futile ideas about the world he originally harbored. The male protagonist walks away humbled and ready to apply himself to further spiritual work.

In the following story, al-Qushayrī narrates the story of a man who approaches an old woman in the desert to give her money in charity. She bests him by performing a miracle (*karāma*) and producing money out of nothing. By revealing her spiritual mastery,

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[102] Doty, "Mapping the Characteristic of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide," 37.
[103] See al-Sulamī's accounts of Ghufayra and Shaʿwana, both of whom wept themselves blind and responded to male critics with wisdom teachings. Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 96–97, 106–7. Laury Silvers discusses Shaʿwana's heated encounter with a male critic in Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014, 50. Rābiʿa al-Azdiyya rebuffs a man's attempts to marry her and demeans him in the process. Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 128–29. Fātima al-Naysabūriyya rebukes Dhū al-Nūn for refusing a gift from a woman. Sulamī, 142. Al-Qushayrī recounts more of these "upbraiding tales" (as Silvers terms them), while anonymizing the women involved. See, Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 133, 205, 207; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 117, 183, 185.

the old woman teaches the protagonist that he has no power or means by which to aid her and that he in fact should remember that God, not he, is the source of provision.

> One of the Sufis related: "I was in the desert walking before a caravan, when I saw someone in front of me. I hurried to catch up with him and saw a woman with a staff in her hand walking slowly. I thought that she was exhausted, so I reached into my pocket and brought out twenty dirhams. I told her: 'Take this and wait until the caravan catches up with you. You should then pay your fare with this money and catch up with me in the evening, so that I could arrange everything for you.' She said, as she raised her hand in the air like this and suddenly [I saw] dinars in her palm: 'You take dirhams out of your pocket (*jayb*) and I take dinars out of the unseen (*ghayb*).' "[104]

The old woman in the desert acts like a trickster figure here, supporting the male adept who serves as the protagonist and spiritual subject, while remaining herself untransformed. Despite seemingly standing in for a female spiritual master, this story anonymizes the woman and reduces her spiritual authority to the performance of a trick that serves to expand the protagonist's spiritual understanding.

A similar story is told in Sahl al-Tustarī's (d. 283/896) Qur'anic commentary about a group of men who enter a cave to find a woman living in it. She is not named. The cave-dweller proceeds to teach them about the meaning of divine love (*ḥubb*).[105] Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī also records a story about Dhū'l-Nūn al-Misrī encountering a strange woman in the desert who delivers teachings about love.[106] In each of these cases, the woman is not presented as a spiritual subject in her own right but rather as a means by which the male protagonist undergoes spiritual inspiration or initiation into deeper mystical teachings.

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[104] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 205; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 183. These anecdotes in which the trickster displays great eloquence in Arabic mirror the *maqama* genre. For a discussion of the structure and features of *maqama* as a distinctly Arabic literary genre, see Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama*, 45–52.
[105] Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, 2011, Q104:6. Later summarized in Bāʿūnīyya, *The Principles of Sufism*, 126-9.
[106] Maybudī, *Kashf al-Asrār*, Q49:10.

Through the influence of al-Qushayrī's writing, *siyāḥa* underwent transformation from a laudable ascetic practice to a narrative tool to depict extraordinary spiritual experiences. While al-Qushayrī offers a noticeable number of stories of desert-wandering on behalf of Ibrahīm b. al-Khawwāṣ, these tales are narrated in formulaic ways and act as literary tropes. For comparison, al-Sarrāj tells a story about Ibrahīm b. al-Khawwāṣ travelling with a male companion when a scorpion crawls over al-Khawwāṣ's thighs. His male companion, al-Muzayyan al-Kabīr, stands to kill the scorpion when Ibrahīm b. al-Khawwāṣ says, "Leave it. For everything is in need of us, while we are in need of nothing."[107] Al-Qushayrī reports the same story,[108] but further reports some other stories of al-Khawwāṣ in the desert where he encounters miraculous liminal figures that guide him on his way. In one of these tales, al-Khawwāṣ meets a stranger who points him in the right direction and disappears.[109] This story depicts al-Khawwāṣ as a receiver of divine guidance. While the stranger is given a male pronoun, nothing else about him is indicated. In other stories, al-Qushayrī elaborates on the theme of the anonymous guide in the wilderness using an identifiably inferior social other. The narrative functions in significantly different ways when non-elites are employed as the narrative device.

In the following tale, al-Khawwāṣ encounters a male Christian whose role in the story is memorable because of his sudden conversion to Islam after being given divine proof of al-Khawwāṣ's superior spiritual status. While the Christian performs a miracle,

[107] Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ*, 187.
[108] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 323; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 300.
[109] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 391; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 371.

the pedagogical value of the story is in the fact that the source of his spiritual power was not himself but in his association with al-Khawwāṣ.

> Ibrahīm al-Khawwāṣ related: "Once I went into the desert. In the middle of it I met a Christian wearing a girdle (*zunnar*).[110] He requested that he be my companion, and we traveled together for seven days. He told me: 'O monk of the monotheists (*ḥanafiyya*), show your hospitality, for we are hungry!' I said: 'My God, do not let me be disgraced before this unbeliever!' I then saw a tray with food, roast meat, dates and a pitcher full of water. We ate, drank and walked for seven more days. This time I spoke before him, saying: 'O monk of the Christians, show me what you can! For it's now your turn!' He leaned upon his staff and said a prayer, and, lo, there appeared before us two trays with twice the food that was on my tray. I was bewildered, grew pale and refused to eat. He persisted, but I did not respond to him until he finally said: 'I have two good tidings for you. First, I bear witness that there is no deity but God and that Muhammad is His messenger.' And he untied his belt. 'As for the second, I prayed: 'My God, if this servant of Yours has any worth in Your eyes, give me such-and-such.' And He did'.[111]

Here, the narrative of a male Sufi meeting a social inferior follows the same trickster model indicated above. A Sufi man enters the desert, encounters a stranger, and emerges with a crucial spiritual lesson or sudden mystical insight.[112] The insight al-Khawwāṣ gains here is knowledge of his own special status in the eyes of God. This indicates that it is not al-Khawwāṣ who is the recipient of the lesson but al-Qushayrī's readers to whom al-Qushayrī conveys al-Khawwāṣ's high status as a Sufi predecessor. The figure through whom such insight unfolds usually occupies an inferior social position while paradoxically displaying a superior spiritual position for a moment. This superior position is temporary and

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[110] The *zunnār* was a belt that marked Christians and Jews as non-Muslims in ʿAbbāsid society. For some background, see Tritton, "Zunnār."

[111] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 393; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 373. The competition between al-Khawwāṣ and the Christian here to miraculously produce food stands in parallel to the Qur'anic narrative of Moses's competition with the Pharaoh's magicians. For an analysis of this narrative in light of biblical texts, see Smith, "Moses and Pharaoh's Magicians." Al-Qushayrī's story is unique in that the Christian is given miraculous powers, unlike the magicians in the narrative of Moses. However, the Christian's spiritual gifts come through his acquaintance with al-Khawwāṣ and thus the narrative points its source as al-Khawwāṣ and not the Christian.

[112] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 227, 259, 273, 278–79, 321, 338, 388; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 205, 235, 250–51, 256, 298, 316, 368–69.

transitory. Thus, the sudden inversion of accepted social hierarchies can act as a shocking disruption of the norm and makes the moral of the story that much more powerful.

In another story, al-Qushayrī relates the tale of Bunān al-Ḥammāl meeting a strange woman, who chastises him as he travels to Mecca for carrying provisions instead of relying on God. The woman's spiritual insight, seemingly placing her in an elevated position, is offset by al-Qushayrī's neglecting to name her. Her offering of a female slave as a spiritual gift serves as a reminder for Bunān that God provides for all his needs. The stranger's offering of a female slave to teach a male Sufi a spiritual lesson is mirrored in al-Qushayrī's offering up of narrativized women to teach the reader a spiritual lesson—that God provides for those who rely on God.

> It is recounted that Bunān al-Ḥammāl said: "Once I set out on a journey from Egypt to Mecca with some provisions. A woman approached me and said: 'Bunān, you are a porter. You carry [your provisions] on your back, because you do not believe that God will provide for you!' So I threw my provisions away. I continued on my journey without eating anything for three days. Then I found an anklet on the road and said to myself: 'I will carry it until I come upon its owner. Maybe he will give me something when I return it to him.' Then the same woman appeared before me and told me: 'So now you are a merchant! You say: "Maybe I will come upon its owner, so that I could take something from him!"' She then threw a few coins at me, saying: 'Spend them!' They lasted almost until I reached Mecca." It is related that Bunān was in need of a slave girl to serve him. His need came to the attention of his friends, who collected her price for him and told him: "Here's the money. A group [of slaves] will come to you and you will purchase the one who suits you most." When the group arrived, the opinions of all agreed on a certain woman and they told him [Bunān]: "This one is right for you!" They [the friends] asked her owner what her price was. He answered that she was not for sale. When they pleaded with him, he said: "This woman belongs to Bunān the Porter. A woman from Samarqand wants to present her to him." So she was brought to Bunān.[113]

This story depicts a trickster woman, presumably free, purchasing an enslaved girl as a gift for Bunān, an example of the power of one type of woman over another. However, the

[113] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 207; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 185. While the story does not specify that the woman on the road to Mecca and the woman from Samarqand are the same person, the story implies it is the same woman given that she has shown up before and seems personally invested in Bunān's edification.

freewoman's agency is utilized in the story for the betterment of Bunān, while she herself, like the enslaved girl, remains unnamed and marginal to the story.

The difference between al-Sulamī's story of Umm Kulthūm, quoted at the start of this chapter, and the stories of these trickster women and non-elite men is in whose perspective is centered. Umm Kulthūm's story is one of her own deep recognition of God. In the trickster tales, the women and non-elite men are made exceptional to their social group. They are othered and made suprahuman, such that no woman, Christian or enslaved individual could measure up to them in real life. These narrativized characters aid elite men through their mysterious presence, expounding upon Sufi themes, but remain themselves objects for spiritual use by the elite male protagonist and the elite male author.

3.3.3 Racialized men and early instances of the Magical Negro trope

The use of female tricksters in Sufi tales parallels the use of racialized men in these *siyāḥa* stories. In one instance, al-Qushayrī offers a near-identical story to the one about the woman who produced gold, this time replacing her character with a Black man. In the story, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 371/981), an elite and renowned Sufi teacher, seeks to give charity to a trickster-type figure identified solely by physical markers that narratively cast him in an inferior social position. Al-Qushayrī marks the mysterious man as "poor" and "black."[114] These identity markers have little to do with the plot of the story. Instead, these markers serve as a stark amplifier of the out-of-the-ordinary nature of what Abū al-Ḥasan

[114] While there were Black elite members in Islamicate societies (and extreme reverence for Bilāl, the dark-skinned companion of Muḥammad, see Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 187–88; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 166.), famous Black author al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/868) wrote a treatise called "The Glory of the Black Race" (*Risālat mufākharāt al-sūdān ʿalā al-bīdān*, offering evidence of racial perception in the formative and early classical period of Islamic history.

al-Baṣrī witnesses. In this case, the paradox lies in a dark-skinned individual who is presumed by al-Baṣrī to be impoverished. However, when al-Baṣrī attempts to aid him by offering him charity, the man reveals himself to be spiritually powerful, as well as incredibly rich. Al-Qushayrī relates:

> I heard Abū al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī say: "At ʿAbbādān there was a poor black man who used to frequent the [local] ruins. I took something with me and sought him out. When his eyes fell on me, he smiled and pointed with his hand toward the earth. I saw that the entire earth was covered with shining gold. He told me: 'Give what you have brought!' I gave it to him. However, his spiritual state frightened me so, that I ran away from him."[115]

Al-Baṣrī narrates the tale such that a mysterious individual, marked deviant by his skin color and poor social class, reveals great spiritual power and diminishes the male protagonist's act of charity as a result. The presentation of this individual as both poor and black heightens the strangeness of his spiritual power through the double impact of his social class and skin color. Al-Qushayrī's identification of the poor man's skin color is highly significant. Orfali and Saab note that the Qur'ān and prophetic traditions associate piety with "whitened faces," and wretchedness with "blackened faces."[116] Indeed, al-Qushayrī uses these color symbols in his *Risāla* to depict excessive joy as a characteristic of the impious:

> Abū Bakr al-Kattānī said: "In a dream I saw a young man, the most handsome I had ever seen. I asked him who he was. 'I am the fear of God (*taqwa*),' he answered. 'Where do you reside,' I asked him. 'In the heart of every sad individual,' he answered. Then I turned and saw a black woman, as ugly as one can [possibly] be. I asked her who she was. She answered: 'I am laughter.' I asked her: 'Where do you reside?' 'In every cheerful, carefree heart,' she answered. When I woke up, I made a vow never to laugh, unless I am overcome [with laughter]."[117]

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[115] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 388; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 368. Silvers writes, "In some of these stories, black skin seems to articulate the ideal of spiritual poverty by connecting the lowest social status…with the highest spiritual status." Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014, 43.
[116] Sīrjānī, Orfali, and Saab, *Sufism, Black and White*, 13.
[117] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 423; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 402.

In another instance, al-Qushayrī utilizes the phrase, "My God, make her black!" as a curse.[118] Thus, when a poor Black man surpasses al-Baṣrī in mystical state and material prosperity by producing gold from the earth with great spiritual mastery, we note another use of paradox to deliver a spiritual lesson through a narrative character that is coded inferior to the elite masculine ideal through physical markers. Al-Qushayrī's depiction of laughter as an ugly Black woman to be avoided by Sufis demonstrates a case of gendering used to caution men against embracing joy in the material world. The use of a Black man in a trickster role in a physical space decentered from elite urban institutions is a lesson to the reader that the spiritual is the inverse of perceived reality. Thus, the poor may be rich, and those with dark skin (normatively symbolizing a wretched spiritual state in classical Arabic literature) may have attained the height of spiritual perfection. When al-Baṣrī runs away from the poor Black man, we see again how the socially inferior individual (gendered as a masculine subordinate in need of receiving help from a free elite man) demonstrates presumed dominant masculine traits in the context of Sufi pedagogical tales that utilize situational inversion as a teaching tool.

The trickster tales I have cited thus far have much in common with the "Magical Negro" (MN) trope prevalent in modern film. While the trickster trope in medieval Sufi literature and the MN trope in modern visual media occur in divergent contexts, studying *topoi* in Sufi literature through current scholarship on the MN Trope offers new

[118] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 413; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 392. For some discussion of the use of Blackness as a curse in Islamic literature, see Lange, "On That Day When Faces Will Be White or Black," 433–37.

perspectives on the implications of depictions of social others in Sufi trickster tales—including the power discourses propagated by such narrative techniques.

Glenn and Cunningham note that MN roles fictionalize Black characters by attributing to them magical or spiritual gifts that help white characters, Often, these gifts represent folk wisdom that is set in stark contrast to the intellectual cognition of the white protagonist.[119] Given the spiritual power attributed to these Black characters, the audience is presented with an "inversion of real-life power-structure,"[120] but the Black character's inability to use their own powers to help themselves and their use of their abilities in service of the white protagonist ultimately keeps the MN character in a liminal status that ultimately "confers superiority" to the White protagonist. [121] While Matthew Hughey attributes the origin of the MN trope to films and media from the 1990s,[122] the appearance of similarly coded social inferiors (including racialized Black strangers) in Sufi stories is an example of prevalent attitudes and common utilizations of social inferiors by elite social actors in service of upholding moral and spiritual hegemony long before the emergence of film as a medium of story-telling.

In many of these trickster tales that al-Qushayrī and others narrate, the socially inferior character is set in a rural or exurban space, at ruins, in caves, cemeteries, mountains, deserts and on the frontiers of major urban centers. The physical setting of these

[119] Glenn and Cunningham, "The Power of Black Magic," 142. For earlier and comparable discussions of the MN Trope, see Entman and Rojecki, *The Black Image in the White Mind*.
[120] Glenn and Cunningham, "The Power of Black Magic," 150.
[121] Glenn and Cunningham, 136.
[122] Hughey, "Cinethetic Racism."

stories far from civilization is an echo of the sites through which early ascetics undertook *siyāḥa.* In these trickster tales, these sites are reformulated as liminal spaces that Sufis no longer physically visit, but where pedagogical tales of social inversion can occur. Such inversion functions as an evocative metaphor of the Unseen realm (*ghayb*), where a Sufi aspirant can receive direct divine intervention and wisdom in the guise of an unlikely source.

3.3.4 Liminal spaces of spiritual transformation

The use of the wilderness as the site for such spiritual transformations aided by social inferiors represents the non-urban locations which elite males imagined were inhabited by their social inferiors. While the wilderness becomes a liminal space where a male Sufi protagonist is transformed, it is not presented as his primary location. Elite men are depicted as practicing Sufism in urban centers, only travelling to exurban sites to encounter the unusual. The ubiquity of such stories indicates how the fifth/eleventh century witnessed the constructions of sites of gendered identity: the urban being the domain of elite masculinity and the exurban the domain of those who deviate from that elite masculine norm.

While one may assume women would be relegated in such stories to domestic spaces, many of these narrativized stories of the wilderness employ female characters to heighten the experience of strangeness. This to some extent presumes that women are not normally found in the desert, making their narrative appearance there that much more paradoxical and therefore evocative of spiritual power. Whether women historically continued to dwell and travel through the wilderness, narratively male Sufis enjoyed depicting strange female characters in such circumstances. The women in the wilderness

appear to the male subjective gaze as captivating sites for divine manifestation and thereby mark male experience as spiritually extraordinary through that strangeness.

The use of the wilderness takes on more metaphorical and fantastical elements in Sufi narrative in the generations after al-Qushayrī. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī, for example, speaks of the desert as a liminal spiritual space where the divine presence can be encountered.[123] ʿAṭṭār portrays the wilderness as the setting of Sufi "conversions" where famous Sufi men such as Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī became inducted into the Sufi path by means of the miracles he witnessed in such liminal spaces.[124] Sufi hagiographies and poetry continued to employ *siyāḥa* as a pretext for miracle stories, and many projected these narratives of the wilderness back onto the earliest generations of mystics and ascetics prior to the rise of institutionalized Sufism.

3.4 Conclusion

In *God's Unruly Friends,* Ahmet Karamustafa offers a striking portrait of deviant renunciants and antinomian groups that formed in response to elite urban Sufism at the turn of the seventh/thirteenth century.[125] What is of particular interest here is that the Qalandars, Haydaris and Abdals of Rūm reintroduced ascetic wandering and bodily mortification in an urban context while at the same time engaging an exclusively male membership—at least until the modern period. In this way, the impacts of urbanization continued to inform asceticism even as extra-institutional practices were revived. Ascetic wandering was

[123] Rūmī, *The Mathnawí of Jalálu'ddín Rúmí*, 1:396, 1:2783.
[124] ʿAṭṭār, *Memorial of God's Friends*, 164–65.
[125] Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends*, 22.

reinstated in urban spaces rather than the hinterlands. Qalandars established institutional spaces to dwell for the winter seasons when the weather was too harsh for their wanderings. We have little information about female Qalandars prior to the modern period. The revival of wandering practices after the fifth/eleventh century retained urban, male-exclusive, and institutional characteristics, and thus the gradual decline of *siyāḥa* continued to impact ascetic practices even as groups evolved to revive *siyāḥa*. The development of these exclusivist groups of wanderers brings up an important question about the enduring effects of gendered, raced, and classed discourses, functioning as languages that negotiate identity and power, beyond their instrumental roles and long after their original contexts change and transform.

This chapter investigated evolving discourses of ascetic wandering beginning with al-Sulamī's depiction of a range of male and female wanderers, preserving biographical details of their spiritual inclinations and practices. Following criticism from al-Sarrāj, al-Qushayrī, Hujwīrī, and al-Ghazālī, *siyāḥa* gradually declined as a Sufi practice while *khalwa* became more popular as a means of self-isolation. It is difficult to determine for a fact if the early criticisms of *siyāḥa* were the direct cause of the decline in its practice. It seems more likely that these criticisms mirrored ongoing processes including urbanization and institutionalization that reduced the meaningfulness and desirability of practices of ascetic wandering. *Khalwa* represented the same ascetic ideal of *ʿuzla* (withdrawal from society), but localized seclusion in cells within the body of Sufi institutions such as *khānaqāhs* and *ribāṭs*. By setting new preferences for communal practice, or more accurately individual practice within communal spaces, Sufis constructed physical sites of practice and erected physical boundaries that operated as gendered social filters, limiting

female and non-elite access to Sufi institutions. In these homosocial environments, Sufi men developed rituals of confirmation and transmission that conferred authority through male bodies.

A large number of depictions of *siyāḥa* underwent narrativization during the emergence of these localized Sufi institutions. These fantastical narrativizations resulted in further centering of elite male spiritual subjectivity. By casting elite Sufi men as protagonists and free and enslaved women, racialized men, and non-Muslim individuals as anonymous liminal figures in the wilderness through whom the male protagonist transforms, Sufi authors reduced the social power of their counterparts through narrative mechanisms of othering. These narratives marginalized women, racialized men and non-elite individuals and transformed *siyāḥa* into a metaphor that upheld androcentric spiritual subjectivity. Narrativizing *siyāḥa* also resulted in the localization of elite male practice in urban spaces and the relegation of all other representations of spirituality to rural, domestic or exurban spaces. While these different spaces were sites of diverse activities and social discourse, they share one characteristic in that they ceased to be the main communal node for elite male practice of Sufism. The emergence of urban institutions, the reduction of exurban ascetic travel, and the narrativization of *siyāḥa* contributed to the urbanization of male-centered Sufism and the ongoing marginalization of social inferiors from normative Islamic mysticisms.

In the next two chapters, I address male hagiographical representations of counter-hegemonic practices amongst Sufi women, specifically celibacy and ascetic fasting that resulted in loss of menstruation. I analyze these counter-hegemonic practices through their

filtered representations in male-authored writings to illustrate how selective narrativization and discourses of gender differentiation perpetuated androcentric models of Sufism.[126]

[126] For some discussions of how these Sufi texts can be read in ways that do not presuppose a gender binary, see Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*, 181–220; Geissinger, "Applying Gender and Queer Theory to Pre-Modern Sources." Some aspects of discourse that challenges the gender binary are elaborated in Chapter Five.

4 *Shahwa*: Gendering Desire and Chastity

In the second chapter, I argued that the presence of the Karrāmis as rivals to the elite ascetics of Nishapur encouraged al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī to reconstruct asceticism as an inner renunciation for male Sufi aspirants. Chapter three analyzed rural/urban rivalry in the development of institutions of Nishapuri Sufism and the gendered boundaries that were erected as a result of the urbanization of Sufism. Chapters four and five explore how urban androcentrism propagated by the Nishapuri trio resulted in diminished female and non-elite participation in Sufism. By tracing the reception history of al-Sulamī's and al-Qushayrī's writings, I note further centering of elite male sexual and spiritual subjectivity in the discourses of male authors in the generations following the Sufis of fifth/eleventh-century Nishapur.

I observed in the second chapter of this dissertation the equating of male desire for food and for women in an anecdote al-Qushayrī attributed to Bisṭāmī.[1] A generation later, al-Ghazālī developed al-Qushayrī's ideas of the comparability of women and food in his *Kitāb kasr al-shahwatayn* (On curbing the two appetites). In this chapter of his *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (Reviving the sciences of religion), al-Ghazālī identifies two main types of *shahwa*: the desire for food and the desire for sex. Al-Ghazālī specifically defines sexual lust as "the craving of the penis for coitus with women," thus constructing *shahwa* through a subjective

[1] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 38; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 32.

male desire for women rather than conceiving of *shahwa* as a universal human experience.[2] In al-Ghazālī's belief, sexual lust and greed for food are the source of every other evil in the human soul.[3] The confluence of these two types of *shahwa* and the role of androcentric discourse of *shahwa* in the gendering of Nishapuri Sufism is the subject of the final two chapters of this dissertation.

This chapter investigates how al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī centered elite male aspirants' sexual perspectives through constructing *shahwa* and different forms of desire in highly gendered ways. By casting chastity as an androcentric struggle based in the social and personal experiences of elite male attraction to women and male adolescents, al-Qushayrī reinforces elite men as the ideal Sufis. The next chapter analyzes Sufi presentations of ascetic fasting (*sawm, jūʿ*) as an antidote to greed for food. Through discussions of ascetic fasting, male Sufi authors relegated women and non-elite individuals to the role of objects of the elite male gaze by highlighting and essentializing male mental acuity and female/non-elite physicality in the description of starving ascetic, thus further perpetuating androcentrism and male agency while downplaying female and non-elite subjectivity. When some women achieved considerable status in Sufi circles, male authors constructed exceptional positions for them that reintegrated them into the social patriarchal system, as for example by conferring upon them the status of an honorary man. Such reabsorbing of anomalies continues to privilege the elite male as the standard and ideal by making maleness the dominant frame of reference for intellectual or spiritual

[2] Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn*, 3:80; Ghazālī, *Curbing the Two Appetites*, 32.
[3] Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn*, 3:80; Ghazālī, *Curbing the Two Appetites*, 32–33.

accomplishment. Together, these two chapters illustrate the role of gender differentiation in the construction of medieval Sufism upon the ideal of the elite male body.

In the rest of this chapter, I investigate and contextualize Nishapuri Sufi debates about chastity as a spiritual virtue and consider the challenge of promoting Sufi celibacy while maintaining marriage as a prophetic ideal. After highlighting the tensions al-Qushayrī makes palpable between Sufi valorizations of chastity and Sunni promotion of marriage as a prophetic tradition, I explore the ways in which Sufi discourses of chastity and marriage are gendered to privilege male spiritual identity and female social identity. Al-Qushayrī promotes male subjectivity by presenting chastity as a male achievement and a female expectation. He decenters Sufi women's spiritual achievements by diminishing women to instrumental roles as wives to Sufi men. Through gendering the language of *shahwa*, chastity and marriage, al-Qushayrī presents men as primarily spiritual subjects while depicting women as primarily defined by their social relationships and only secondarily as spiritual subjects. The legacy of al-Qushayrī's gendered treatment of chastity is palpable both in the biographical writings of his grandson al-Fārisī and in Ibn al-Jawzī's repurposing of al-Sulamī's biographies of early Sufi women in the seventh/thirteenth century.

4.1.1 Sufi elaborations of Qur'anic constructions of material desires

Al-Qushayrī's resolve to marry the central tenets of Sufism to Qur'anic principles involved seeking out Qur'anic precedents for his understanding of asceticism. While he offers no proof-text from the Qur'an at the start of his chapter on asceticism, later in the entry on *zuhd* he writes, "God Most High urged His creatures to abstain from the material rewards of the world, when He said: "The enjoyment of this world is little; the world to

come is better for him who fears God."[4] Many other Qur'anic verses characterize the life of this world (*ḥayāt al-dunyā*) as one of ornament (*zīna*) and frivolous enjoyment (*mutʿa*). Qur'anic verse 28:60 reads, "Whatever things you have been given for the life of this world are merely [temporary] gratification and vanity: that which is with God is better and more lasting–will you not use your reason?"[5] This verse suggests earthly bounties are temporary: attractive, but ultimately of no real consequence. Al-Qushayrī utilizes the language of the Qur'an to teach material detachment and draws on the Qur'anic model of addressing men as the default subjects of spiritual asceticism.

In a particularly gendered depiction of material indulgence in the Qur'an, women, children, and wealth are presented as major distractions and obstacles to male spiritual focus. In verse 3:14, the Qur'an describes four categories of desire (*shahwa*, pl. *shahawāt*) that are made appealing for (elite male) individuals: women, children, wealth, and food.

> The love of desirable things is made alluring for men–women, children, gold and silver treasures piled up high, horses with fine markings, livestock, and farmland–these may be the joys of this life, but God has the best place to return to.

In the translation rendered here, Abdel Haleem translates the gender-neutral term *nās* ("people") as "men." While his translation may be inaccurate in a literal sense, the verse lends itself to such a gendered interpretation when analyzed. Denoting women, children, gold and silver, horses, cattle and land as the main sources of material enjoyment reflects tribal Arabian economic interests and a fundamentally androcentric understanding of women and children as possessions to amass alongside cattle, land and gold. Kecia Ali explores male ownership (*milk*) of wives who are free women as a parallel to the ownership

[4] Q4:77. Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 152; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 134.
[5] All translations from the Qur'an are taken from Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*.

of enslaved individuals in classical Islamic jurisprudence with comparable elite male rights to sexual access of these social inferiors denoted.[6] Thus, the Qur'anic presentation of women, cattle and material goods as alluring possessions sets a Qur'anic precedent of addressing men as the default readers and the default spiritual subject being directed to look beyond their desires for material ownership. The inclusion of women as earthly possessions that potentially distract one from the spiritual life to come presumes it is free men whose spiritual life is at stake, not women, enslaved individuals, or children. While women were known to own property, amass wealth, cattle, and riches—the verse does not address them, instead offering pronounced ethical directives exclusively to elite men to aid them in moving beyond their day-to-day material experience of earthly life. [7]

Turning to the Sufi *tafsīr* tradition, an interesting progression in the focus on women as material objects of male desire occurs between the earlier exegetes, al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī, and later Sufi exegetes who drew influence from al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's writings, such as Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. (d. 606/1209), Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī (d. 1137/1725) and Aḥmad b. ʿAjība (d. 1224/1809).[8] In the earliest written Sufi commentary on verse 3:14, al-Sulamī establishes a mutually exclusive relationship between earthly life and spiritual life.[9]

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[6] Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*, 6.

[7] The Qur'an also addresses women's rights to inheritance, for example in verse 4:7 and 4:11, thus indicating that Q 3:14 had reason to acknowledge women's material possessions as well. The salient point is that men's subjectivity is centered while women are objectified, despite each of these genders being susceptible to attachment to their material possessions. For discussion of women's inheritance in Islam, see Schacht and Layish, "Mīrāth." Also, Chaudhry, "The Myth of Misogyny."

[8] The influence of al-Qushayrī on early modern Sufi exegetes has been documented by scholars. Rippin, "Sufism," 358; ʿAjība, Aresmouk, and Fitzgerald, *The Immense Ocean*, xxi.

[9] Even though Sahl al-Tustarī's written Sufi commentary on the Qur'an predates al-Sulamī's, al-Tustarī's students did not record commentary for this particular verse.

> It is said: Whoever is preoccupied with these things, they will cut him off from the Truth. Whoever diminishes them and opposes them, peace and security will return unto him and the path to realities will open up to him.[10]

Al-Sulamī establishes an inverse relationship between material attachment and spiritual attainment and suggests one cannot have the two simultaneously. The belief that living a spiritual life precludes enjoying an earthly life proliferates in Sufi doctrine, though the verse itself arguably suggests one can enjoy the fruits of both.[11]

In his interpretation of the verse, al-Qushayrī explains material attachment as a symptom of *shahwa*, which we can translate as "lust," "desire" or "carnal appetite."[12] Al-Qushayrī establishes that *shahwa* applies not just to material goods, but also excessive attachment to spiritual attainment including the pursuit of pleasure through the performance of "acts of obedience."[13] He adds that *shahwa* includes "anything that veils you from witnessing."[14] While al-Sulamī stresses the inverse relationship between materiality and spirituality, al-Qushayrī nuances the discussion of lower order attachments by adding that it goes beyond tangible possessions such as cattle and gold, and into the realm of desires for personal achievement. Note that while al-Sulamī describes women and children as "things" that act as obstacles to spiritual connection, initially al-Qushayrī seems to avoid the gendered aspects of the Qur'anic verse and does not directly allude to women, children and cattle as the marks of material attachment. In al-Qushayrī's attempt to focus

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[10] Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tafsīr*, Q3:14.
[11] For early references to renouncing earthly life in Sufi sources and non-Sufi sources, see Melchert, "Ahmad Ibn Hanbal's Book of Renunciation," 358.
[12] Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif al-Ishārāt*, Q3:14.
[13] Qushayrī, Q3:14.
[14] Qushayrī, Q3:14. For al-Qushayrī's understanding of the concept of witnessing (*shuhūd*), see Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 122; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 108. Cf. al-Qushayrī's understanding of *shahwa* in his *Risāla* where he associates it primarily with a desire for food. Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 176–80; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 157–60.

on the centrality of one's inner motivations, thus establishing an inner renunciation, he seems to provide room in his interpretation of verse 3:14 for a non-gendered practice of renunciation that encourages self-reflection on the motivation for one's actions. However, his *Risāla* contains multiple anecdotes of male Sufis praying for the elimination of *shahwat al-nisā'* (the desire for women) from their hearts as well as directives to male aspirants to avoid women as much as possible.[15] Thus, a nuanced analysis of al-Qushayrī's writings reveals a highly gendered approach to the concept of *shahwa* that continues to center the male spiritual experience and sexual agency in ways that support androcentric constructions of Sufi asceticism.

Later medieval and early modern Sufi *tafsīr* of verse 3:14 reveals the extent to which male authors conflated women with earthly desire and thus illuminates the ongoing impact of al-Qushayrī's discourse on *shahwa* in later renderings of the meaning of this verse. Both Rūzbihān Baqlī and the commentary attributed to Muhyī al-Dīn b. al-ʿArabi (d. 638/1240) echo the interpretations of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī for this verse, demonstrating the impact the Nishapuri shaykhs had on Sufi writings and Qur'anic commentaries following them. Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī and Aḥmad b. ʿAjība's interpretations of verse 3:14 reflect an extension of al-Qushayrī's concept of desire that fully conflates women with men's carnal appetites. Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī was an twelfth/eighteenth-century Turkish scholar and Sufi practitioner of the Jilwati order who penned written commentaries on Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī's *Mathnāwī*.[16] In addressing verse 3:14, he writes: "God began (this

[15] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 38, 76, 410, 435; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 32, 65–66, 388, 415.
[16] Kut, "Ismāʿīl Ḥaḳḳī."

verse) with the feminine pronoun "them" due to women being well-known aspects of desire (*shahwa*), for they are the ropes of Satan."[17] The immediate focus on women indicates the extent to which *shahwa* developed as a gendered concept, implicating women as the main threat to male spirituality.

At first, thirteenth/nineteenth-century Moroccan Sufi Aḥmad b. ʿAjība echoes al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī's interpretation, writing, "Every *shahwa* veils the heart from God," but then he adds, "God began with the pinnacle of carnal desires (*raʾs al-shahawāt*): women." He continues, "One who is enamored with them or has indulged in them in an unlawful manner has departed from the remembrance of God."[18] Ibn ʿAjība goes on to quote a prophetic tradition that reads, "I have not left amongst those who follow me a corruption (*fitna*) more harmful upon men than women."[19] The overt focus by both these early modern authors on the function of women as foils for the spiritual journeys of men and a major source of desire or *shahwa* underlies their understanding of the world as a place of gendered bodies that present great obstacles to the default male aspirants who are seeking divine connection. In such a worldview, women serve as tools of the material world (or Satan, in Ḥaqqī's view) that distract a male aspirant from God. As a result, women's own spiritual journeys are neglected and inconsequential since their spiritual attainment is not centered in the writings of male authors. While al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī are not

[17] Ḥaqqī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān*, Q3:14. Similar characterizations of women have been attributed to male authors as early Tertullian (d. 220), who wrote that women are "the gateways of Satan." For a full treatment of this line attributed to Tertullian, see Church, "Sex and Salvation in Tertullian." For conflations of women and the devil in Hindu contexts as a result of colonialism, see Chakraborty, "Women, Serpent and Devil."
[18] Ibn ʿAjība, *Al-Baḥr al-Madīd fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Majīd*, Q3:14.
[19] Ibn ʿAjība, Q3:14. Marion Katz addresses the discourse of *fitna* and its impact on women's attendance at mosques in Chapter One of Katz, *Women in the Mosque*. Katz acknowledges shifting dimensions of the discourse of women's corruptive influence and sexually tempting presence but offers convincing evidence that discourses of *fitna* led to progressively more restriction on women's communal participation over time.

nearly as overt in their interpretation of verse 3:14 as evidence of women's role as spiritual detractors, al-Qushayrī overtly denigrates women as non-spiritual and hindrances to men in his *Risāla* in such a way that later Sufi writers could elaborate increasingly more heavily gendered paradigms of *shahwa* in Sufi discourse.

There is somewhat of a progression in the exegetical comments noted above, from understanding women as aspects of earthly enjoyment to perceiving them as the pinnacle of earthly temptation. Al-Sulamī associates women with the material world on the same level as children, wealth, cattle and land. Al-Qushayrī introduces the concept of *shahwa* to indicate hidden lusts that separate individuals from spiritual life. Ismāʿīl Hakki conflates women fully with these lusts and establishes them as a tool of Satan. Finally, Ibn ʿAjība offers an all-out identification of women with the pinnacle of lust and temptation. The difference is in gravity of expression, not necessarily in viewpoint. All these authors find in verse 3:14 Qur'anic precedent for the identification of women with the material realm—and a pretext for the extent to which women exist as threats to male spirituality. Fearing the role of women in hindering the spiritual path of male aspirants is a very common trope in medieval Sufi literature and becomes more obvious a theme in early modern Sufi writings.[20] Al-Sulamī records male Sufis verbalizing their disdain of women[21] and al-Qushayrī notes early Sufi men warning other men from spending time with women.[22]

[20] Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 428–29.
[21] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 142–43, 258–59.
[22] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 62, 335, 410; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 52, 313, 388. The gender treatment of ascetic fasting in Sufi biographies is addressed in the next chapter.

Their gendered perspectives are reflected in the development of later Sufism. Avoiding women became a common refrain in Sufi ascetic doctrine.[23]

Examining Sufi constructions of *shahwa* reveals that ascetic inclinations and the development of Sufi virtues were constructed to champion free, elite men above that which they had material ownership over. Because Sufi asceticism was forged in the crucible of elite male experience and heavily gendered to privilege male Sufi aspirants, when male authors record the lives of female ascetics they employ a variety of narrative techniques to account for the presence of these women who do not fit neatly into the bounds of androcentric Sufism. These narrative techniques operate as a means by which to reabsorb anomalies back into the social patriarchal system in which the authors were invested. The following section examines discourse on *shahwa* in the context of narratives of ascetic women to discern how male Sufi authors stress gender difference through the ways they depict Sufi men and women in pursuit of chastity.

4.2 Debating chastity in the *Risāla*

Resisting food lust through voluntary hunger and supplementary fasting earns a chapter in al-Qushayrī's *Risāla*, while resisting sexual lust through chastity does not earn a chapter nor any overt mention from al-Qushayrī. This does not indicate a lack of Sufi interest in chastity as a close reading of al-Qushayrī's *Risāla* and other texts reveals a

[23] Despite Sufi writers prescribing the avoidance of women and attributing such prescriptions to early Sufis, there are traces in Sufi biographical material that reveal many women were heavily involved in ascetic circles of practice, some hosting their own teaching circles that men, enslaved individuals, and children were happy to attend. Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam*, 2013, 108–43; Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014, 47–51. Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 106–7, 226–27.

general preoccupation with chastity as a spiritual virtue.[24] However, sexual abstinence is a contentious subject for al-Qushayrī given the fact that competing ascetic movements endorsed celibacy as a practice while the ḥadīth tradition endorses marriage.[25] The reference to Muḥammad never asking for relief from his desire for women in the story of al-Bisṭāmī recounted in Chapter Two also indicates this tension that existed between endorsement of ascetic celibacy and the ample prophetic examples of marriage and sexual intimacy. Because Islamic jurisprudence only permits sexual intercourse made licit via marriage or concubinage and prophetic tradition promotes licit sexual relations as modeled by Muḥammad, illicit intercourse presents a threat of *shahwa* in al-Qushayrī's eyes. Thus, while he does not promote celibacy specifically, he advocates for chastity as a religious virtue. However, because al-Qushayrī presents male chastity as a spiritual feat, while female chastity is presumed, *shahwa* is constructed upon elite male subjective experience. The difference in presentations of male and female chastity is explored below.

4.2.1 Gender difference in Sufi discourses of chastity

Despite the Islamic endorsement of marriage and licit sex as a prophetic practice, al-Qushayrī recounts many stories that valorize men who show extreme sexual restraint. In several parts of his *Risāla*, al-Qushayrī uses the example of a chaste man as a paragon of virtue and spiritual commitment at the expense of a female character who attempts to seduce the man away from his spiritual life by means of illicit extramarital sex. The story

[24] Al-Qushayrī defines chastity as being "protected from carnal desires" (*shahawāt*) in his commentary on verse 3:39 of the Qur'an. Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif al-Ishārāt*, Q3:39. He valorizes abstention from women in several places in his *Risāla*, see Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 38, 76, 410, 435. Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 32, 65–66, 388, 415.
[25] Bashir, "Islamic Tradition and Celibacy."

of Jurayj is one example in which a female prostitute attempts to seduce a righteous man and fails.[26] In another story, an unnamed woman brings Abū Zurʿa al-Janbī into her home under false pretenses. When he learns of her true intentions, he tries to escape her, yelling "My God! Make her black!" and al-Qushayrī tells us she was blackened.[27] This episode echoes the Unveiled Bride passage from the second chapter that presents the material world as a woman whose face must be blackened by the true ascetic.[28] Here too a woman is blackened at the hands of a man rebuking her attempts at seduction, which would otherwise cause him to fall from his spiritual state. The racialized aspect of the humiliation of the female character here is echoed throughout the *Epistle* wherein black marks a lowly spiritual or social status.[29] It is no coincidence that the gender treatment of women as material hindrances to the spiritual life employs racialized symbols of degradation—it further reinforces the fact that token features of underrepresented, non-elite, marginalized individuals are commonly used in discourses of power to symbolize hierarchy and an idealized social and spiritual order. In the stories recounted in the *Risāla*, the chastity of the male protagonists, at the expense of women who attempt to seduce them, symbolizes their piety and their rejection of the material world.

Al-Qushayrī's depictions of sexual desire and chastity commonly portray male subjects resisting desire to enact chastity through a rejection of women or male adolescents.

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[26] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 383; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 364. Jurayj shows up in some ḥadīths as a monk (*rāhib*) from before the advent of Islam who lived in a hermitage. See Bukhārī, *Al-Adab al-Mufrad*, #33.
[27] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 413; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 391–92.
[28] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 155; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 137.
[29] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 29, 423; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 24, 402. For more on the narrative use of racialized skin as a symbol in Sufi literature, see Lange, "On That Day When Faces Will Be White or Black."

Female subjects of chastity are never presented as having been tempted by sexual desire and refusing to give in. Women in Sufi narratives are depicted as virtuous because of their faithful performance of their socially inscribed roles as women, wives, and mothers. They are not presented as individuals tested by means of their sexual desires.[30] Al-Qushayrī tells one story of a woman mistaken to be a fornicator who is vindicated when it is found that she was falsely accused:

> …there was a lady with a suckling child. [Once] there passed by her a young man with a handsome face and beautiful complexion. She exclaimed: 'My God, make my child be like that! The child then spoke, saying: 'My God, don't make me be like that!'" Muḥammad b. Sīrīn said: "I was watching the Prophet – may God bless and greet him – as he was recounting the words of the suckling child. Then, there passed by them a woman who was said to have stolen, fornicated and was punished [for that]. The mother exclaimed: 'God, do not make my child be like that!' The child, however, said: 'God, make me be like her!' Its mother inquired it about that. It answered: 'This young man is a tyrant, and for the woman, although they say about her that she has fornicated, she in fact has not; although they say that she has stolen she has not. She has simply kept saying: 'God is sufficient for me!' "[31]

A few subtle things should be emphasized. The woman accused of fornication is put in contrast to a handsome man who was outwardly appealing but truly a tyrant. The lesson here is that those outwardly seeming to be of high rank (free elite men with handsome looks) may in reality possess a lesser spirit, and those of low rank (criminal women) may be loftier in spirit. Social inversion is common in al-Qushayrī's *Risāla* and the narrativization of unnamed others has already been addressed in Chapter Three. In such

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[30] The story of Yūsuf and Zulaykha in the Qur'an presents an interesting counterpoint to these narratives. In the Qur'an, Zulaykha and the women of Egypt are depicted as being sexually tempted by Yūsuf. Al-Qushayrī diminishes both Zulaykha and the women of Egypt's sexual temptation in the *Risāla* by stating that the women cut their hands because of Yūsuf's "sudden appearance" not because of his beauty and that Zulaykha was unbothered by Yūsuf because she had encountered him earlier. Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 115; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 101. Al-Qushayrī foregrounds Zulaykha's wifehood both in the *Risāla* and in his commentary on Qur'anic verse 12:25. For a discussion of how this Qur'anic story treats female sexuality and ultimately continues to center male subjectivity through Yūsuf's rejection of Zulaykha's advances, see Merguerian and Najmabadi, "Zulaykha and Yusuf."

[31] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 383–84; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 364.

stories, the medieval Islamic social hierarchy that positions free, elite men at the top is inverted for dramatic effect as a method of edifying Sufi storytelling. In this particular story, the woman's own perspective is neglected, and the question of her sexual promiscuity is embedded in a larger narrative that entirely subverts the social impression that she is morally corrupt. The revelation of her avoiding legally prohibited acts of sex lacks the humanizing details of any subjective struggle with lust and chastity—it is instead simply presumed that her reliance on God is coupled with chastity.

In anecdotes where a man's moral rectitude is challenged, his struggle with chastity is explored in depth as part of his spiritual journey. In the following story, al-Qushayrī once more champions a male character for avoiding temptation while ignoring the spiritual work of the female character facing the same situation. The story tells of three men who got stuck in a cave. In desperation, they seek divine intervention to save them, so each man recounts to God an instance in which he sought God's pleasure through an extreme act of virtue. The first man describes returning home late one night with fresh milk for his elderly parents only to find them asleep. So, he stood awake all night waiting to feed them without disturbing their sleep. The second remembers being in the heat of passion but states he chose not to engage in sexual intercourse with a woman he desired deeply, despite being presented an opportunity to do so. The third could not send wages to an employee who had disappeared, instead choosing to invest the unclaimed money. The employee returns one day to collect his wages and the man demonstrates honesty by giving him both his wages and the wealth his wages had generated in the meantime. It is the second man's story that offers glimmers of understanding about al-Qushayrī's gendered representation of *shahwa*:

> The second man said: 'My God, I had a cousin whom I loved more than any other human being. I tried to instill in her affection for me. However, she turned me down. Finally, one

> year she had fallen on hard times and came to me. I gave her one hundred and twenty dinars on the condition that she would become mine. So she came to me and as I was about to make her mine and she told me: 'It is not allowed for you to break the seal unless you have the right [to do so]!' So I avoided sleeping with her and walked away from her, leaving with her all the gold that I had given her. My God, if I did that seeking Your pleasure, relieve us from our plight!'[32]

This man is presented to the reader as having resisted his base desires for illicit sex after finding an opportunity to have sex with a woman he loved because she asserts he must marry her to gain the right to her virginity. Despite his use of money to purchase her illicit sexual access, the story presents him as virtuous for helping his cousin when she was in need and then leaving her the money when she refuses to fulfill her end of the bargain. Her own spirituality and knowledge of Islamic marital and sexual ethics is neglected, despite her reminder being the very cause of his virtuous actions. In fact, her reliance on her male cousin for money in the first place further reflects a cultural and literary context in which male social agency and spiritual capacity is centered. The male character's spiritual achievement is highlighted, while the female character's experience is neglected. Al-Qushayrī presents the male character as cultivating chastity and the female character as a one-dimensional narrative prop that magnifies his moral behavior and spiritual virtue without addressing her subjective experience of resisting illicit sex.

4.3 *Shawq*: Gendering spiritual desire

Al-Qushayrī offers a parallel to *shahwa* in discourses of *shawq*, spiritual yearning and longing for God (sometimes also referred to as *hawā*, meaning passionate desire). *Shawq* represents a redirection of intense desire from the material world towards higher

[32] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 384–85; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 365. This story also appears as a ḥadīth in Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 34:162. Also in Bāʿūnīyya, *The Principles of Sufism*, 36–39.

spiritual ends. In this way, *shahwa* is the shadow of *shawq* and *shawq* is the perfection of *shahwa*. Al-Qushayrī cites Yaḥyā b. Muʿādh saying, "One of the signs of *shawq* (passionate longing) is the weaning of one's limbs from *shahawāt*."[33] The continuum presented here between *shawq* and *shahwa* is at times complicated when discourses of adult male desire for male youths is invoked as a metaphor for divine love.

Despite al-Qushayrī's strict disapproval of relationships with an *amrad* and his designation of such relationships as illicit, he offers this type of relationship as a model to illustrate yearning as a spiritual virtue. Here, al-Qushayrī uses the story of an old man and his adolescent male lover as a spiritual analogy of divine love:

> It is related that a beardless youth (*ḥadath*) was seen striking an old man in the face with his sandal. Someone asked him: "Aren't you ashamed? How can you beat this old man on his cheeks in such a way?" He said, "His crime is great." They asked: "What is that?" He said: "This man claims that he desires me (*yahwāni*), yet he has not seen me for three nights."[34]

Al-Qushayrī uses this story to teach his readers to fortify their relationship to God through cultivating their pursuit of divine love. This anecdote appears in a section immediately following al-Qushayrī's exposition of impatience as a hallmark of the Sufi's passionate yearning for God.[35] Thus, this beardless youth who chastises his elder lover for not yearning for him with enough intensity becomes a symbol of God testing human lovers to determine the depth of sincerity in their longing for divine union. The use of *hawā* (desire) as a metaphor to point to a spiritual reality stands in contrast here to al-Qushayrī's own advice to avoid the company of youths.[36] The fact that male desire for women/male youths

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[33] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 358; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 336.
[34] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 224; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 200.
[35] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 222; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 200.
[36] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 62; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 52.

represents an obstacle to spiritual attainment in most of the *Risāla* does not dissuade al-Qushayrī from using women, male adolescents and enslaved concubines as narrative props when needed. Thus, the symbolic use of the feminine/deficient masculine is not necessarily consistent, though there is an overall inclination to prefer, center and valorize the male Sufi adept as an example to other Sufis.

Overcoming material desire by cultivating spiritual yearning is thus constructed as an elite male virtue. The elite male point of view shapes the whole schemata of spiritual resistance to earthly entities in Sufi asceticism. Whatever men lust after is labelled earthly while whatever they yearn for and aspire to become is a symbol of the spiritual. In this way, *shahwa* and *shawq* are placed in juxtaposition but both center the elite male as the frame of reference. While al-Sulamī depicts a number of female ascetics and mystics engaging discourses of *shawq*, we notice that the women of the *Dhikr al-niswa* are rarely depicted engaging in discourses of *shahwa*. The gendered implications of presenting women's spiritual struggles as a separate gender experience from that of men's struggle with *shahwa* is analyzed below.

Al-Sulamī attributes the pursuit of *shawq* or spiritual yearning to a number of women from the third/eighth to the fourth/tenth century in his *Dhikr al-niswa*, particularly the women of Basra on behalf of whom he records a variety of mystical teachings on divine love.[37] He recounts how Maryam al-Baṣriyya would devolve into spiritual ecstasy

[37] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 78–79, 84–85, 94–95, 98–99, 106–7, 110–11, 114–15. See also Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014, 32–35.

whenever someone spoke about love and died during such a session.[38] ʿAfīfa al-Mushtāqa (al-Sulamī records her nickname as *al-mushtāqa* "The one who yearns") is characterized as having been constantly enraptured and lost in divine love.[39] Ḥabība al-ʿAdawiyya is said to have supplicated at night, saying,

> My God! The stars have set, everyone's eyes are closed, the rulers have locked the gates of the city, and every lover is alone with his beloved; this is when I devote myself to You."[40]

Al-Sulamī presents *shawq* as a mark of the deepest infatuation with God. He writes on behalf of Fāṭima bt. ʿAbd Allah,

> It is in the nature of one whose heart is touched by desire (*shawq*) that he forgets his destiny in this world and the Hereafter, he loses control over himself, and, unlike Majnūn, he finds no satisfaction in service. He becomes delirious, wasted, dazed, and confused in his infatuation for his Master.[41]

Despite numerous allusions to *shawq*, rarely do the women of al-Sulamī's *Dhikr* discuss *shahwa*. While he records some women teaching transcendence beyond the material world,[42] the specific language of *shahwa* rarely appears in women's aphorisms. An interesting exception appears when Rābiʿa al-Azdiyya rebukes a male Sufi for desiring her.

> ʿAbd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd asked Rābiʿa al-Azdiyya to marry him. She refused and kept away from him, and he was greatly distressed. However, he bore her refusal patiently until one day she gave him permission to see her. When he entered her house she said, "Oh lustful one (*yā shahwānī*)! What did you see in me that aroused your desire? Why don't you ask a lustful person like yourself to marry you?"[43]

Rābiʿa al-Azdiyya's denial of ʿAbd al-Wāḥid includes a denigration of him as a *shahwānī*, one overcome by *shahwa,* despite him seeking marriage rather than illicit sex from her.

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[38] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 84–85.
[39] Sulamī, 98–99.
[40] Sulamī, 202–3. This prayer of *shawq* is explored in Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014, 48.
[41] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 172–73.
[42] Sulamī, 76–77.
[43] Sulamī, 128–29.

This passage seems to indicate that *shahwa* did not refer to fornication (*zināʾ*) alone but also could include men desiring women for marriage, perhaps on account of their specific intentions for marrying a particular woman. Al-Sulamī records another teaching on *shahwa* attributed to a Basran women named Baḥriyya in which she says, "When the heart abandons its desires (*shahawāt*), it becomes habituated to knowledge and pursues it, bearing everything which this entails."[44]

While Baḥriyya uses the language of desire, the majority of al-Sulamī's female ascetics engage the language of preoccupation (*shughl*) with the material world as an obstacle to divine connection.[45] Nusiyya bt. Salmān cries upon the birth of her son, "Oh, Lord! You do not see me as someone worthy of Your worship. So for this You have preoccupied me with a child (*fa-shaghaltanī bi-walad*)!"[46] The distress of Nusiyya conveys the difficulties and frustrations some ascetic women may have felt in pursuing the ascetic life amidst social and familial pressure to uphold their roles as wives and mothers.[47] Similarly, Lubāba al-Mutaʿabbida says, "I am ashamed lest God see me preoccupied

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[44] Sulamī, 148-9. Cf. 118-9.
[45] Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014, 82–83, 92–93, 110–11, 116–17, 124–25, 126–27, 226–27.
[46] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 92–93. Another anecdote about a mother lamenting the distraction of her son can be found in Sulamī, 110–13. Marion Katz reproduces an anecdote in which Muʿādha al-ʿAdawiyya attends prayers at a mosque to avoid the distraction of her children. Katz, *Women in the Mosque*, 118. For more on presentations of motherhood in Sufism, see Salamah-Qudsi, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety*, 2018, 83–102. Also Salamah-Qudsi, "A Lightning Trigger or a Stumbling Block: Mother Images and Roles in Classical Sufism."
[47] Many of the tales al-Qushayrī includes about women presents them in these roles of wife and/or mother. He includes no women in his biography of Sufis as ascetics in their own right. His grandson al-Fārisī includes several women and takes care to include the names of their spouses and the number of their children (particularly if the children were renowned scholars). He does not record these same familial details for most male biographies. Al-Fārisī's depiction of male and female ascetics is addressed in the final section of this chapter.

(*mushtaghila*) with anything other than him."[48] That al-Sulamī attributes *shawq* to women readily but not *shahwa* reflects the centering of male desire in Sufi asceticism. The contrasting emphasis on female preoccupation with family members indicates the privileging of male spiritual subjectivity and female social attachments. The gendered treatment of *shahwa* as a spiritual hindrance for men and *shughl* as a spiritual hindrance for women reveals the ways in which al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī constructed Sufism primarily for men as ethical and spiritual subjects while prioritizing women's domestic and social functions over their spiritual efforts. Casting material attachment as carnal desire for men and preoccupation with family as earthly attachment for women polarizes the spiritual work of the Sufi on the basis of gender. The following section explores how depictions of marriage between Sufi individuals deepens gender differentiation by privileging male sexual agency and limiting married women's access to Sufi practice both discursively by marginalizing their subjective experiences and practically through readings of Islamic legal jurisprudence that restricts women's agency over their bodies and ritual practices.[49]

4.4 Centering male sexual subjectivity in Sufi marriages

Marriage is depicted in variant ways depending on the gender of the Sufi aspirant in question. For male Sufi aspirants, marriage is presented as an obstacle to their spirituality while, for women, marriage represents a site of duty and virtuous behavior.[50] Al-Qushayrī notes Abū Bakr al-Warrāq saying, "Three things corrupt an aspirant (*murīd*): marriage,

[48] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 82–83, 124–25.
[49] For an overview of the role of Islamic jurisprudence in limiting women's bodily agency, see Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam*, 13, 146-72.
[50] Arin Salamah-Qudsi explores narratives of marriage as an obstacle to spiritual attainment in Salamah-Qudsi, *Sufism and Early Islamic Piety*, 2018, 25–52.

writing ḥadīth, and travel."[51] Contrastingly, Al-Sulamī depicts Safrāʾ al-Rāziyya, one of the wives of Abū Ḥafṣ al-Naysabūrī, as a faithful, loyal wife whose spiritual blessings come by way of her husband.

> Abū Hafṣ lived with her [Safrāʾ] for a time. When he wanted to leave Rayy, he said to her: If you want me to divorce you and pay back your dowry I shall do so, for I am leaving and I do not know when I shall be able to see you again." She replied, "I prefer not to do that. Instead, allow me to remain married to you, so that the blessings of this marriage will accrue to me, and that I will be in your thoughts and prayers.[52]

Despite being given a chance to be divorced by her husband, Safrāʾ explains her decision to remain married (at least nominally given the unlikelihood of her ever seeing him again) as a spiritual act of devotion and a source of blessing. Her understanding that her continued marriage to Abū Ḥafs would reap blessings for her is in stark contrast to al-Sulamī's representation of Aḥmad b. Abī al-Ḥawārī, the husband of Rābiʿa bt. Ismāʿīl, as someone's whose desire for marriage distracts him from God.

Rābiʿa bt. Ismāʿīl was known as a student of a famed Syrian mystic woman by the name of Ḥukayma al-Dimishqiyya.[53] Upon hearing Aḥmad b. Abī al-Ḥawārī was to take another wife, Ḥukayma chastises him to Rābiʿa, saying,

> How could he?…Given what I have been told about his good judgment, how could his heart be distracted from God by two women? Have you not learned the interpretation of this verse: 'Except one who comes to God with a sound heart'?…It means that when one encounters God, there should be nothing in his heart other than Him.[54]

In al-Sulamī's depiction, Ḥukayma presumes both Rābiʿa and the second wife will function as distractions to al-Ḥawārī. Contrastingly, later sources depict Rābiʿa as a source of great

[51] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 237; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 215.
[52] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 162–63.
[53] Sulamī, 126–27.
[54] Sulamī, 126–27.

spiritual motivation for her husband.[55] The circumstances of Rābiʿa bt. Ismāʿīl's marriage aside, al-Sulamī's presentation of Ḥukayma's objection to al-Ḥawārī's second marriage reinforces discourses of marriage as an obstacle to male spiritual attainment while ignoring the role of marriage in Rābiʿa bt. Ismāʿīl's spiritual journey. By centering al-Ḥawārī's sexuality and spirituality, Rābiʿa is relegated to the margins of the text.

The story of Rābiʿa bt. Ismāʿīl takes on further gendered depths in Abū al-Faraj b. al-Jawzī's (d. 645/1256) *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*. Ibn al-Jawzī writes his biographical encyclopedia of Sufis two centuries after al-Sulamī's death and relies on al-Sulamī for a lot of his biographical data. However, Ibn al-Jawzī includes additional details that reflect the interests, discourses and narrative historicizations specific to his mileu. Thus, Ibn al-Jawzī's hagiographies offer useful insights into how al-Sulamī's legacy contributed to and evolved into later Sufi contexts beyond the sociopolitical circumstances of Nishapur. By analyzing the reception history of the *Dhikr al-niswa*, we can trace evolving discourses of gender and identify how al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī contributed to these later constructions of Sufi gendered ideals.

While al-Sulamī gives no indication of Rābiʿa bt. Ismāʿīl's own feelings about her husband's decision to marry another wife, Ibn al-Jawzī presents her as the one who originally suggested al-Ḥawārī marry another in order to give herself some freedom from her wifely duties including her sexual obligations to her husband to pursue her spiritual practices. Ibn al-Jawzī records al-Ḥawārī saying,

[55] Sulamī, 316–17.

> She said to me: "I do not love you in the way that married couples do; instead, I love you as one of the Sufi brethren. I desired you only in order to serve you, and I wanted and hoped that my fortune would be consumed by someone like you and your brethren."
>
> She also said to me: "It is not lawful for me to forbid you from myself or another. So, go ahead and get married to another woman." He said: So I married three times. She would feed me meat and say: "Go with strength to your wives!" If I wanted to have sex with her during the day, she would say: "I implore you in the name of God to not make me break my fast today." And if I wanted her during the night, she would say: "I implore you in the name of God to grant me this night for God's sake."[56]

Ibn al-Jawzī is insistent here that Rābiʿa bt. Ismāʿīl not only suggested al-Ḥawārī take on multiple wives but used to encourage him to have sex with them while preserving her own celibacy. Al-Sulamī does not record any of these details, presenting al-Ḥawārī's marriages as an aspect of his *shahwa*, not his wife's *shawq* for God. Rābiʿa demonstrates a lack of sexual interest in him and, while acknowledging al-Ḥawārī's legal right to her sexually, petitions him to leave her to her spiritual works. While Ḥukayma criticizes al-Ḥawārī for his preoccupation with wives, Rābiʿa bt. Ismāʿīl seems to welcome it. Yet her own celibacy is not presented as a victory over *shahwa*. The gendered treatment of her celibacy as an ascetic excess means it is forgivable only because her faithful wifely attitude means she encourages her husband to seek out his rights and sexual pleasure elsewhere. While al-Sulamī marks al-Ḥawārī's interest in women, Ibn al-Jawzī minimizes this information, reducing it down to a subtle indication in al-Ḥawārī's statement that he married three times instead of simply marrying one more woman as per Rābiʿa's suggestion. Ibn al-Jawzī foregrounds Rābiʿa bt. Ismāʿīl's support of her husband's polygamy and diminishes her sexual and spiritual agency.

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[56] Sulamī, 316–17. I relied on the Cairo edition of *Ṣifat al-ṣafwā* published in 2000, Cornell's edition and translation of selections from the *Ṣifa*, as well as unpublished translation and editing work by Laury Silvers and Yasmine Amin for my study of Ibn al-Jawzī. I have modified some translations for the sake of consistency.

In his entry on al-Ḥawārī in the *Ṭabaqāt*, al-Sulamī describes the Ḥawārī family as highly ascetic. Al-Sulamī identifies al-Ḥawārī's brother, father and son as having ascetic inclinations and writes, "Their house is one of scrupulosity and asceticism (*fa-baytuhum bayt al-waraʿ wa-al-zuhd*)."[57] However, he conspicuously avoids identifying Aḥmad as ascetic himself. Despite such omissions, most of the spiritual teachings al-Sulamī ascribes to al-Ḥawārī relate to opposing one's desires for the material world. In one anecdote, al-Sulamī writes, "…al-Ḥawārī said: Whoever looks upon the world with the eye of desire and with love for it, God removes the light of certainty and asceticism (*zuhd*) from his heart."[58] Nowhere in his male entries does al-Sulamī allude to al-Ḥawārī's wives or marriages despite highlighting his kinship ties to male ascetics.[59] His spirituality and piety is foregrounded and his role as husband is completely minimized. This stands in clear contrast to the biographical notices of Rābiʿa whom al-Sulamī immediately identifies as al-Ḥawārī's wife and whose teachings and devotions are relayed through her husband. Rābiʿa bt. Ismāʿīl functions as a paragon of a faithful wife in service of her husband and only secondarily appears as an ascetic in her own right.

It is a common method of gendering in Sufi literature to place men's Sufi spirituality as a primary marker of their identity while demoting women's spirituality as secondary to their role as wives to spiritual men. Al-Sulamī puts Amat Allāh al-Jabaliyya's spirituality in competition to her husband's in a story in which Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī gives priority to her wifehood over her spiritual station. Al-Sulamī credits Amat Allāh with

[57] Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyya*, 91.
[58] Sulamī, 92.
[59] Sulamī, 91–94.

clairvoyant abilities and specifically a unique capacity to see the actions of absent individuals. Al-Sulamī narrates that Amat Allāh's husband visited al-Bisṭāmī and told him of his wife's abilities. While placing a wet cloth on the stool, al-Bisṭāmī says, "Tell your wife to inform you of this if she is really truthful and ask her what is on the stool."[60] Once ʿAbd Allāh al-Jabalī leaves, Bistamī removes the cloth and the husband deems his wife a liar when she states she sees nothing on the stool. Al-Sulamī editorializes, "Abū Yazīd intended by this to veil her from her husband."[61] With no further explanation as to why it was necessary to hide Amat Allāh's spiritual abilities from her husband, we can only compare this story to similar narrations in which the wife of a famous male Sufi is described as having outstripped her husband only to have a perceptive Sufi master conceal that knowledge from the husband in some way.[62] These stories cast married male Sufis as somewhat inept in that they are unable to recognize the stations of their wives. More importantly, these narratives establish the priority of the husband's spirituality over his wife's—differentiating male and female spiritual life by diminishing women's spiritual power in favor of privileging the position of the husband. Men take precedence as Sufis in their marriages, while women are marked as wives first and Sufis second.

4.4.1 Recreating gendered hierarchies from the ḥadīth tradition

Prioritizing men as spiritual subjects and women as wives mirrors the gender hierarchy promoted by ḥadīth—a subsection of Islamic knowledge al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī privileged deeply and utilized in their establishment of Sufism as a concrete

[60] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 208–9.
[61] Sulamī, 208–9.
[62] Sulamī, 232–33.

movement. Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), a contemporary of al-Qushayrī's and a well-known scholar of ḥadīth in Nishapur narrates a tradition that promotes the role of the husband over the wife and creates a hierarchy of submission:

> The Messenger of God said: If I could command one to bow themselves in prostration to another, I would have commanded women to bow in prostration to their husbands on account of men's rights over them that God has exalted.[63]

Shortly after that, Bayhaqī narrates the following tradition, "The Messenger of God said: If a man calls his wife to his bed and she disobey and he spends the night in anger, the angels curse her until the morning."[64] These traditions endorse the unequivocal right of a husband to demand sex from his wife and promote his position as so much above that of a woman that he all but occupies the position of God in his household.

That men take precedence over their wives in spiritual hierarchy and have the right to their wives' sexual availability shapes Sufi understandings of the role of female Sufi ascetics in marriage. Rābiʿa bt. Ismāʿīl's story underscores the social expectations imposed on ascetic women to marry and more importantly to honor the rights and sexual desires of their husband. Thus, they can only pursue spiritual practices after their husbands' rights are upheld. Laury Silvers writes,

> The narrative construction of Rābiʿa and Aḥmad's piety is framed in terms of their faithfulness to the marital norms of their day… . Her social standing as a wife would require her obedience, including constant sexual availability. She would be socially and legally obligated to check with him before fasting through the day or praying throughout the night, in case he might want to have sex with her. He is depicted expressing his pride in his wife's resolve to worship God in these moments by demonstrating how she both resisted his overtures and acknowledged his right to sex with her.[65]

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[63] Bayhaqī, *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, 7:475.
[64] Bayhaqī, 7:476.
[65] Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014, 38.

In this way, sexual chastity and celibacy is a fraught subject for married ascetic women on account of the strictures of Islamic jurisprudence. Their celibacy was not theirs to maintain, but their husbands' to choose to accept or deny. Perhaps for this reason, some ascetic women chose to avoid marriage to remain celibate,[66] but most non-elite women could not bypass the economic realities of medieval Islamicate society that made marriage to men a necessity for survival. Meanwhile, many elite women could not escape the social currency their marriage afforded their families—as with the patrician women of Nishapur whose marriage created important links in vast scholarly and political networks. Chastity and celibacy as ascetic ideals are packaged differently for male Sufi aspirants, whose chastity involved the resistance of *shahwa*, while female Sufi aspirants were restricted in their ability to pursue chastity given the limitations imposed by Islamic jurisprudence and society.

4.5 Gendering chastity through language

Abū Bakr al-Fārisī, al-Qushayrī's grandson, describes a number of the women of Nishapur in the generations following al-Sulamī's female ascetics by designations that indicate their piety, the most common being *ʿafīfa* (which can be translated as chaste or virtuous), a word he uses almost like an epithet.[67] A thorough analysis of these entries reveals some correlation between epithets of female chastity and unmarried status. Al-Fārisī, for example, designates Karīma al-Marwaziyya (d. 461/1070) as *ʿafīfa*. She later

[66] Silvers, 37.
[67] Fārisī and Ṣarfīnī, *Al-Muntakhab min al-Siyāq li-Tārīkh Naysābūr*, #688, #725, #800, #829, #889, #1433, #1454, #1459, #1605.

receives notice as a celibate woman who never married.[68] Meanwhile, for the women who do not have this specific epithet attached to them, but are otherwise described as righteous (*ṣāliḥa*), al-Fārisī notes that they married and birthed children.[69] More data is required to confirm whether the epithet of ʿ*afīfa* indicates celibacy or general chastity within the bounds of licit sexual relationships. Nonetheless, these women's ʿ*afāf* is not depicted as the result of a successful subduing of *shahwa,* rather, it operates as justification for their inclusion by rendering them sexually unavailable and therefore unproblematic to their male counterparts. Because all the women in al-Fārisī's history come from the upper patrician classes of Nishapuri society, they seem to have had some amount of agency to marry or to remain celibate, given their affluence and therefore self-sufficiency. At the same time, Abū ʿAlī al-Daqqāq's arrangement of al-Qushayrī and Fāṭima's marriage indicates that patrician alliances and interests took precedence over women's personal wishes. This might have meant the prominent women of Nishapur were expected to marry to cement kinship connections with important men.

When we track the use of ʿ*afāf* as an epithet in al-Fārisī's entries on men, interesting differences emerge that point to the gendering of asceticism two generations after al-Qushayrī. Though al-Fārisī uses the term ʿ*afīf* to describe a large number of men, he sometimes qualifies that epithet for Nishapuri men in a way he never does for female entries by using it in conjunction with other spiritual terms, for example: ʿ*afīf al-nafs* (pure of self), ʿ*afīf al-bāṭin* (inwardly pure), and ʿ*afīf al-sarīra* (pure of heart).[70] In one male

[68] Sayeed, *Women and the Transmission of Religious Knowledge in Islam*, 2013, 116.
[69] Fārisī and Ṣarfīnī, *Al-Muntakhab min al-Siyāq li-Tārīkh Naysābūr*, #681, #1378, #1431, #1458.
[70] Fārisī and Ṣarfīnī, #309, #321, #339, #954, #988, #1441.

entry, he uses the epithet ʿ*afīf* but notes the man had a son who was a renowned *faqīh* (a scholar of jurisprudence).[71] This implies that al-Fārisī used ʿ*afāf* to denote sexual chastity for women but inner virtue for men. In this way, al-Fārisī qualifies the chastity of men as a purity of the heart from ego or moral ambiguity. Al-Fārisī's use of language to differentiate between the modes of piety for men and women promotes a type of gender differentiation that centers elite men as spiritual subjects and challenges women to transcend their gender category by subduing their physicality and sexual desirability before men. The bifurcation of male subjectivity and female physicality becomes clear in analysis of physical descriptions of male and female Sufis in Ibn al-Jawzī's *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, which is the subject of the next chapter.

As noted in Chapter two, al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī worked in tandem to reduce the popularity of externalized performances of asceticism including the excessive pursuit of celibacy. Fifth/eleventh-century Nishapur was a transitional moment for the character of Sufism. Sufism in Nishapur was an inherited family-based institution and so marriage was crucial to maintaining institutional continuity and family dominance. There was little opportunity to gain prominence as a Sufi in Nishapur simply through self-mortification or personal piety. Al-Fārisī's biographies suggest that many women may have continued to avoid marriage as a practice of spiritual exertion. However, while al-Sulamī records instances of women's celibacy, later records in al-Qushayrī and al-Fārisī's writings marked celibacy as a virtue for men and undesirable for women. By the time Ibn al-Jawzī rewrites al-Sulamī's *Dhikr*, women's choices to remain unmarried and/or celibate were depicted as

[71] Fārisī and Ṣarfīnī, #1011.

a forgivable quirk of personality should the woman demonstrate exceptional intellectual and spiritual capacity—or, more accurately, display a willingness to uphold rather than overturn the ideals of social patriarchy.

4.6 Conclusion

Because the language of *shahwa* prioritizes male spiritual experience and sexual agency, it supports the valorization of sexually abstinent men, while it subordinates women's asceticism to their roles as loyal and sexually available wives. Celibate men are represented as having spiritually attained purity, while purity is expected of women regardless of their marital status. Thus, the spiritual exertion involved in the cultivation of such virtues is overlooked in female entries. The gendering of *shahwa* and sexual abstinence shapes Sufi depictions of marriage and further genders asceticism as a male endeavor by assuming sexuality as a site of ascetic practice for men rather than women. Rābiʿa bt. Ismāʿīl's attempts to avoid sex with her husband in favor of ascetic practices of fasting and prayer are depicted alongside her recommending her husband retain other wives to fulfill his sexual needs. Her efforts to remain celibate were undermined by the sexual rights her husband presumed to have over her through constructions and perpetuations of Islamic legal rulings that privilege male sexual subjectivity and personal fulfilment.[72] A woman's prayer and fasting had to be mediated by the approval of her husband—and thus her piety is constructed in terms of her deference to her husband. As we have previously

[72] Hoel and Shaikh offer a useful overview of how women have felt disadvantaged by Islamic legal privileging of the husband's right to sexual access. This article also includes a beneficial analysis of ways in which women have resisted androcentric sexual rights through employing their own understandings and interpretations of Islamic text and tradition. Hoel and Shaikh, "Sex as Ibadah."

noted, male Sufi authors conflate women and food as material objects of desire for the male spiritual aspirant—and thus male-authored depictions of women who undertook ascetic fasting offers an interesting case of how women were portrayed as resisting and negotiating their association with material embodiment in the narratives of male Sufi historians. The role of gendered language and gendering discourse in the fasting rituals of female and non-elite ascetics are explored in the next chapter as additional channels of androcentric constructions of Sufi asceticism.

5 *Jūʿ*: Reading women's piety in corporeal terms

The development of an inner renunciation divorced from external bodily performances of asceticism separated Sufis from Karrāmis in medieval Nishapur. The androcentric discourse around this inner renunciation ideologically centered men as the ideal practitioners of Sufism. Through the establishment of Sufi orders in physical spaces like *khānaqāhs* in the fifth/eleventh century, the ideological marginalization of women and non-elites was enacted through physical boundaries as well as well as social ones. When women and non-elite individuals transgressed these boundaries, elite male authors depicted them as anomalies but did not necessarily reject them. Instead, male authors constructed space for these social anomalies such that their examples continued to uphold elite male hegemonic ideals. While elite women who had familial ties to important Sufi men could sometimes access the *khānaqā*, they were barred from institutional authority within it. The diminished participation of women made the homosocial worlds of institutional Sufism a world constructed for elite male bodies.[1] However, any discourse of power will necessarily induce counter-discourses and women continued to play a variety of roles in extra-institutional Sufism.

This chapter investigates women who continued to perform austerities in their homes and in other unregulated spaces, specifically extensive fasting that resulted in

* I would like to thank Rula Abisaab for inspiring my research into how ascetic women might try to eliminate their menstrual cycles to better dedicate themselves to ritual prayers.

[1] For a detailed account of the relationship between sacred structures and the male body, see Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*, 46–60. Kugle's argument relies on Sufi shrines and institutions built around the bones of typically male saints. His analysis of the continuity of the male body and its role in the body politic can be extended to Sufi practices and doctrines outside of Sufi shrines.

physical emaciation. Through an application of Julia Kristeva's abjection theory and a re-reading of Mary Douglas' notion of gender, purity and classification in religion, this chapter argues that ascetic fasting and deliberate starvation became the means by which women could access limited spiritual authority by "purifying" their bodies of perceived marks of femaleness. Simultaneously, male authors used discourses of emaciation to augment the visibility of female corporeality and mark them physically unusual. The lack of female visibility in Sufi institutional spaces resulted in decreased acknowledgment of female subjectivity and the centering of female physicality in hagiographies of pious women diminished the representation of their subjective experiences. The greater focus on female corporeality in male-authored hagiographies continued the work of differentiating female ascetics from the default male Sufi aspirants. The only female "text" that continued to be read by male Sufi authors was the female body. Thus, while the women in al-Sulamī's hagiographies were read as sources of teachings and nodes in networks of mystics, two centuries later the women in Ibn al-Jawzī's biographies were read in increasingly corporeal terms. Thus, women were represented as objects of the male gaze in Sufi hagiographical literature. As I will demonstrate at the end of this chapter, similar narrative techniques in early Sufi writings foregrounded the physicality of non-elite male individuals and diminished their subjective points of view.

This chapter analyzes the gendered consequences of increased corporeal readability through a case study of women's ascetic fasting as depicted in Sufi hagiographical literature over the course of two centuries from al-Sulamī to Ibn al-Jawzī. For female mystics, while ascetic fasting reduced their femininity in the eyes of men by lessening their sexual desirability, fertility, and eliminating their ability to menstruate, it offered

diminished returns as it simultaneously increased their corporeal readability as the female other. I investigate the increased readability of female piety in corporeal terms between al-Sulamī and Ibn al-Jawzī's lifetimes (fifth/eleventh to sixth/thirteenth century) to demonstrate the role of language and narrative hagiography in cementing discourses of gender differentiation. By reading women's bodies as their primary "texts" to establish their piety, Sufi authors centered male spiritual subjectivity and foregrounded women's physicality both as an obstacle to and a site for female spiritual exertion. Thus, a paradoxical relationship exists between the loss of femininity and increased foregrounding of female physicality in the process of male narrativizations of female ascetic exercises.

The first part of this chapter analyzes women's ascetic fasting and its representation in male writings as an abjection of women's femininity. I engage Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) notions of purity in his *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* to investigate how the elimination of fertility and menstruation in female bodies offered ascetic women recognition as pious Sufis because it marked them as more like men. The second part of this chapter explores how the diminishment of female fertility and sexual desirability counterintuitively increased women's readability as material objects instead of spiritual subjects through the gendered language male authors such as Ibn al-Jawzī used to describe female piety. Taken together, these two sections illuminate ways in which gendered hierarchies continue to be perpetuated through both hegemonic and counterhegemonic language and behavior.

5.1 Fasting, abjection and the erasure of social markers of femaleness

Voluntary fasting (*ṣawm al-taṭawwuʿ*) as an ascetic practice appears in the earliest sources of Sufi writing as an indicator of piety and spiritual attainment.[2] Sahl al-Tustarī is said to have fasted so extensively that he only ate once every fifteen days and only once throughout the whole month of Ramaḍān.[3] He described it as one of the most worthy acts of worship.[4] Al-Sarrāj describes a number of early Sufi teachers fasting in perpetuity, both while travelling and when settled.[5] Al-Sulamī cites Umm al-Ḥusayn saying, "One who desires to be recognized for the way of poverty (*faqr*) should choose dirt for a bed, hunger for food, anxiety for happiness, rejection for acceptance, and debasement for glory."[6] At times, contemporaries of these ascetics express concern when they deem someone's fasting to be excessive. A servant of Muʿādha al-ʿAdawiyya responds to her endless fasting and lack of sleep by saying, "You are causing yourself harm."[7] Muʿādha al-ʿAdawiyya dismisses her servant's concern and proceeds with her devotions. These anecdotes indicate a range of responses to ascetic fasting as a practice in the formative period of Sufism.

Despite such common references to ascetic fasting, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī notes ḥadīths and arguments that discourage perpetual fasting in his chapter On the Mysteries of

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[2] Fasting as an ascetic practice occurs in other religious communities and particularly in Christianity. For ascetic fasting in the lives of Christian female mystics, see Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*. For a discussion of fasting, see Berg, "Ṣawm"; Wagtendonk, *Fasting in the Koran*..
[3] Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ*, 162.
[4] Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn*, 3:83; Ghazālī, *Curbing the Two Appetites*, 43–44.
[5] Sarrāj, *Lumaʿ*, 163.
[6] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 238–39.
[7] Sulamī, 88–89.

Fasting (*Kitāb asrār al-ṣawm*).[8] He cites *fiqh* rulings that establish a requirement to break one's fast during specific days of the year associated with feasts (*aʿyād*). These rulings correspond to ḥadīths that debate the validity of voluntary fasting as a religious practice. [9] The content and methods of al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* demonstrate his interest in grounding the Sufi tradition in an Ashʿarī-Shāfiʿī Sunni orthodoxy, just like al-Qushayrī. Al-Ghazālī's efforts to compile Sunni and Sufi knowledge into an encyclopedia of sciences allows us to chart some of the ongoing issues and debates in Nishapur and the broader Sufi and scholarly community in the fifth-sixth/eleventh-twelfth century.

Notwithstanding his advice in the first book of the *Iḥyāʾ* to avoid perpetual fasting, al-Ghazālī spends the majority of his chapter on *shahwa* in the third volume of the *Iḥyāʾ* expounding the virtues of minimal eating and voluntary fasting in abating one's carnal appetite (*shahwa*). The change in stance over the course of two volumes reflects an ongoing trajectory al-Ghazālī promotes in his writings that moves his reader from the realm of outward religious duties to inner cultivation in his *Iḥyāʾ*.[10] In this case, voluntary fasting is not recommended for those concerned only with Islamic law but for those who want to cultivate higher levels of piety.

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[8] Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn*, 1:238.
[9] See for example *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* 18:176. Also, *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* 1:282.
[10] Janssens, "Al-Ghazālī between Philosophy (Falsafa) and Sufism (Taṣawwuf)," 616. By contrast, Timothy Gianotti argues al-Ghazālī considers the knowledge of outward duties is primary, despite the structuring of the *Iḥyāʾ*. Gianotti, "Beyond Both Law and Theology: An Introduction to Al-Ghazālī's 'Science of the Way of the Afterlife' in Reviving Religious Knowledge (Iḥyā' 'Ulūm Al-Dīn)," 598–600. As with al-Qushayrī, al-Ghazālī's interest in emphasizing the outer dimensions of Islamic law simply acts as a protective measure for Sufis the author deems heretical to hegemonic Islam. Just as al-Qushayrī structures his Qur'anic commentary so that it takes the reader from the outer dimensions of worship to the inner cultivation of esoteric knowledge, so too does the *Iḥyāʾ*'s structure mimic the stereotypical Sufi preoccupation with journeying away from the world of external forms towards the inner reality of things. On al-Qushayrī's devotion to Islamic law, see Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar*, 205–19.

Throughout discussions of ascetic fasting in Sufi texts from al-Sarrāj to al-Ghazālī, the practice of fasting is largely abstracted from the physical effects of ongoing deliberate starvation on the body—except in a few cases that are mostly female. Very rarely is fasting inscribed on the bodies of ascetic practitioners when they are male. Rather, for men, it is presented as a form of spiritual devotion that helps one overcome the appetites of the body and lower order desires. In the next section, I investigate how ascetic fasting, while valorized as an indication of one's piety and devotion, is inscribed on the body in gendered ways that ultimately reinforce hegemonic social power relations.

5.1.1 Transcending the station of women through ascetic fasting

The physical consequences of excessive fasting as recorded by Sufi hagiographers include loss of physical mass, fatigue and weakness, amenorrhea (elimination of menstruation), infertility, skin discoloration or dulling, and mental illness. The second part of this chapter will address the specific hagiographical entries that cite these symptoms and explores how male hagiographers highlight one or more of these symptoms in extremely gendered ways. This section will focus on amenorrhea as a consequence of excessive fasting and the social discourse that conflates menstruation with femaleness and lack of menstruation with maleness.

According to a famous ḥadīth, women are described as deficient in religious capacity due to their inability to fast and pray while menstruating or bleeding after

childbirth.[11] Menstruation entails a state of ritual impurity according to Islamic jurisprudence that bars women from prayer, fasting and even touching the Qur'an.[12] While men can also enter states of ritual impurity that bar them from acts of worship, through urination and sexual intercourse for example, their purity can be reinstated immediately through major or minor ablutions (*wuḍūʾ* and *ghusl*). The practical result is that men can access a state of ritual purity at any time, while women who menstruate are involuntarily barred from this state for the duration of their menstrual period.

A ḥadīth found in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* reads,

> The Messenger of God went out to the prayer at Aḍḥā or Fitr and passed some women. So he said, "O group of women! Give alms, for I have seen you are the majority of the inhabitants of the fire." The women said, "Why, O Messenger of God?" He said, "You curse frequently, you are ungrateful to your husbands, and I have not seen anyone more deficient in reason and religion, leading astray the mind of the upright man, than you women." So they said, "What is deficient in our reason and our religion, O Messenger of God?" He said, "Is not the testimony of the woman like half of the testimony of the man?" They said, "Yes, it is." He said, "So that is a consequence of the deficiency in her mind. And is it not [the case] that the menstruating woman does not pray or fast?" They said, "Yes, it is." He said, "That is a consequence of the deficiency in her religion."[13]

Here, menstruation puts women at a disadvantage compared to men due to an assumed discrepancy in the number of prayers and days fasted tallied in men's favor. Al-Sulami quotes this ḥadīth in his *Adab al-ṣuḥba wa ḥusn al-ʿishra*, using it as grounds to encourage men to treat women with a patronizing compassion for their deficient state.[14] The

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[11] *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, 6:9. *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, #2631. For a discussion of the gendered implications and feminist possibilities in this and other ḥadīths regarding women and knowledge, see Shaikh, "Knowledge, Women and Gender in the Ḥadīth."

[12] Maghen, "Close Encounters," 355. For discussions of other non-menstrual instances in which ritual purity intervenes with touching the Qur'an, see Zadeh, "Touching and Ingesting."

[13] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 6:9. This translation is adapted from Bauer, *Gender Hierarchy in the Qur'ān*, 37. For a discussion of the implications of gendering the inhabitants of heaven and hell, see Geissinger, "Are Men the Majority in Paradise, or Women?"

[14] Sulamī, *Majmūʿah-ʾi āṯār-i Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Sulamī*, 2:91. I am indebted to Rkia Cornell's research for this reference. See Cornell, "'Soul of a Woman Was Created Below,'" 265–66.

implication of this ḥadīth is that superiority in religion is available to those who can persist in a state of purity such that it allows uninterrupted devotions. In theory, women could access this same state of purity that allows uninterrupted devotion through voluntary fasting that leads to amenorrhea. Through deliberate starvation, women could reduce or eliminate menstruation and thus create conditions that allow for a perpetual ability to fast and pray comparable to the legal status of men in Islamic jurisprudence.[15] Additionally, Islamic discourse conflates menstruation with femaleness and womanhood, at times referring to women who do not menstruate (whether due to menopause or other reasons) as "man-like" (*imraʾatu ḍayhāʾ*).[16] Thus, through fasting, female ascetics are depicted as transcending their station as women through diminishing social markers of femaleness.

A close examination of purity discourse in al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ* in light of Mary Douglas's notions of purity and ritual and Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection illuminates the ways in which femaleness is treated as something that can be transcended in order to attain a greater state of purity and therefore holiness. The following two sections highlight the ways in which Sufi discourse associates maleness with holiness and purity and femaleness as abject as well as the ways in which female ascetics are portrayed in ways that uphold these gendered discourses of purity through depictions of ascetic fasting.

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[15] Elias, "Female and Feminine in Islamic Mysticism," 211. For a discussion of how certain types of ascetic fasting grant women respite from gendered expectations of marriage and motherhood in Sufi texts, see Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014, 34.

[16] Zajjāj, *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān wa Iʿrābuh*, Q9:30. Also, Māwardī, *Al-Nukat wa-al-ʿuyūn, Tafsīr al-Māwardī*, Q9:30. Verse 9:30 reads, "The Jews say, 'Ezra is the son of God,' and the Christians said, 'The Messiah is the son of God': they said this with their own mouths, repeating (*yuḍāhiʾūna*) what earlier disbelievers had said. May God thwart them! How far astray they have been led." Both these authors take the word *yuḍāhiʾūna* (they repeat) to mean imitating or taking on the likeness of someone else (*yushābihūna*). They write, "It means they imitate, taken from a saying, 'a [man-]like woman,' [who] in likeness to men, does not menstruate."

5.1.2 Abjection, inviolability and the boundaries of the body

Mary Douglas' analysis of bodily impurity in various religions shares parallels with Islamic approaches to purity. Mary Douglas indicates purity discourse in many religions is concerned with matter that leaves the body, "spittle, blood, milk, urine, feces… ." [17] These materials, in Douglas' view, are not dirty or impure in and of themselves but are constructed as such through cultural discourse and regulated behavior.[18] These substances are controlled through purity rituals that symbolically diminish the presence of these pollutants. Islamic *fiqh* classifies most of the material that exits the body as *najis* (impure), a category of substance that impedes one's ability to perform prayer. Rituals of purification including major and minor ablutions (*wuḍūʾ* and *ghusl*) are put forward as means by which to reinstate the purity required for sacred devotions.[19]

Al-Ghazālī expands the pursuit of ritual purity beyond cleansing the body of impurity by recommending pre-emptive voluntary hunger as a way of preventing these substances from being produced by the body in the first place. In his chapter On Curbing

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[17] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 150; Reineke, "This Is My Body," 260. Reineke's analysis applies Douglas' insights to Christian female mystics who undertook ascetic fasting. While Reineke's subjects share many parallels with Sufi ascetics, ultimately the centrality of the Eucharist and other Christian underpinnings differentiate the way in which ascetic fasting was undertaken, as well as its gendered implications, from the Sufi context I analyze here. For more on voluntary fasting and Christian ascetic women, see Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.

[18] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 2.

[19] Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn*, 1:131-6. Reinhart argues that purity is only attached to rituals in Islam and has little consequence outside of the ritual lives of Muslims. He argues impurity is applied to substances not people in Islam and therefore has little moral consequence for the individual. Reinhart, "Impurity/No Danger," 15, 21. Burge suggests there is an eschatological and moral risk for those in a state of ritual impurity that has been overlooked in the analyses of Reinhart as angels are said to flee from those in a state of ritual impurity. Burge, "Impurity / Danger!," 328. While both authors cite al-Ghazālī and address menstruation and gendered objects to a certain extent, they both overlook the gendered moral implications of discourses of purity in Islam, and do not address the ḥadīth of female deficiency as constructing a subordinate position for Muslim women.

the Two Appetites (*al-shahwatayn*, that is the desire for food and sex), al-Ghazālī writes that excessive food causes nocturnal emissions, excretion, frequenting the bathroom for urination, and vomit in the case of excessive eating.[20] All these fluids act as impurities that invalidate prayer and require purification rituals to reinstate one's preparedness for prayer. He goes on to recommend abstinence from food as a way of "facilitating continuous worship."[21] By fasting, one can prevent the body from producing the matter that, upon exiting the body, puts one in a state of ritual impurity. Conceivably, without excreting, one could maintain a state of continuous purity for the duration of one's waking hours. This potentially allows for continuous prayer. However, this state of continuous purity is not accessible for a menstruating woman whose bleeding would invalidate her ability to pray even without food to excrete.

Al-Ghazālī considers the avoidance of food a significant measure to deter the onslaught of two types of lust, which he considers interrelated: the excessive desire for food and for sex.[22] Each of these forms of lust are located at an "orifice" or *farj* in the body. As theorized by Mary Douglas, the orifices of the body act as "vulnerable points of entry and exit," and thus require more rigorous policing for protection from impurity or violation.[23] Julia Kristeva furthers Douglas' argument through the theory of abjection. Kristeva states that the boundaries of the body that separate the subject from the abject also distinguish matter that is considered pure while in the body from matter that is impure and

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[20] Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn*, 3:82, 3:86; Ghazālī, *Curbing the Two Appetites*, 39, 55–56.
[21] Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn*, 3:86; Ghazālī, *Curbing the Two Appetites*, 55. As far as I am aware, al-Ghazālī is the first to recommend fasting as a way of facilitating a state of continuous worship.
[22] Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn*, 3:80; Ghazālī, *Curbing the Two Appetites*, 32.
[23] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 4.

dirty once it traverses the boundary of the body.[24] Al-Ghazālī indicates a similar perspective in his chapter On the Mysteries of Purity (*Kitāb asrār al-ṭahāra*), writing that excrement while within the body does not invalidate one's pure state. He further argues that excrement that cannot be reached easily from the outside, even though it may exist beyond the orifice, does not invalidate purity as it can still be considered within the body.[25] Thus, the body remains in a state of purity for al-Ghazālī even if matter exists outside the orifice so long as it cannot be reached by one's hand. This indicates it is not so much a physical boundary beyond which matter is made abject, but rather a hypothetical one predicated on one's ability to access matter physically.

Kristeva identifies food as a major site of pollution because it crosses the boundaries of the physical self and "penetrates the self's clean and proper body."[26] However, as Mary Douglas argues, each culture produces purity discourses congruent with their cultural system as a whole.[27] While al-Ghazālī seems to share Kristeva's understanding of food as a site, or at least a source, of pollution, his notion of boundaries in the body differ from Kristeva's as he has a certain allowance beyond the physical limits of the body itself. Instead, al-Ghazālī operates on a notion of wholeness and holiness that can only be violated through instrumental physical access.

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[24] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 53.
[25] Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn*, 1:132.
[26] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 75.
[27] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, viii. For a strong analysis of the benefits and flaws of both Douglas and Kristeva's theoretical contributions to notions of purity and the abject, see Klawans, "Was Kristeva Right...about Qumran?"

Putting together al-Ghazālī's ideas of cultivating a state of continuous purity and the body's instrumental inviolability, we can now turn to the marginalization of female ascetics from these purity discourses. The state of continuous purity al-Ghazālī constructs as an ideal privileges male bodies that do not menstruate. Through amenorrhea, young female bodies normatively considered a sexual temptation to men can access this state of purity, albeit with more difficulty. Given the prominent ḥadīth that women are inferior to men in religion and intellect as a result of their forfeited prayers and fasting during menstruation—it seems that amenorrhea could potentially return the share of religion back to women by allowing a young woman to approximate the state of continuous purity available to men.[28] Al-Ghazālī refers to this ḥadīth in his Book on the Etiquette of Marriage.[29] Interestingly, al-Ghazali does not associate women's deficiency with their menstruation here, but rather with their ability to lead men astray through sexual temptation. This, too, can be avoided to a certain extent through emaciation as women's attractiveness was somewhat tied to their plumpness in the writings studied here, as for example in the case of Khansāʾ bt. Khidam whose beauty is attributed to her plump physique.

Despite the agendering potential of ascetic fasting for women, Sufi and Islamic discourse on menstruation continues to construct purity and piety upon the elite male body. Therefore, a woman who does not menstruate or otherwise does not behave in a normatively female fashion is often compared to but not fully equated with a man. Male-

[28] Elias, "Female and Feminine in Islamic Mysticism," 211. For parallels in Christianity that pursue the elimination of "the curse of Eve," Reineke, "This Is My Body," 255.
[29] See Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn*, 2:28.

authored Sufi treatments of menstruation offer further evidence of the ways in which purity and piety are constructed with gendered implications that diminish women and uphold an androcentric preference for maleness.

5.1.3 Menstruation in Islamic and Sufi literature

Although Mary Douglas considers all matter that issues from the body's orifices a potential pollutant in purity discourse, Julia Kristeva puts forward that it is only two categories of matter that religions consider truly a pollutant: excrement and menstrual blood.[30] Kristeva ties both these pollutants to women through the role of motherhood, excrement being the result of maternal nourishment and menstrual blood being intimately tied to breastmilk in classical Greek (and Islamic) medicine.[31] Thus, rites of purification upheld by religions, in Kristeva's view, cement a symbolic understanding of the feminine as evil and in need of separation and cleansing.[32] She writes,

> Polluting objects fall, schematically, into two types: excremental and menstrual. Neither tears or sperm, for instance, although they belong to borders of the body, have any polluting value. … Menstrual blood…threatens the relationship between the sexes.[33]

Kristeva has been criticized for incorrectly marking semen as pure in patriarchal discourse.[34] Indeed, semen is considered impure in many Islamic legal discourses.[35]

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[30] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 71.
[31] Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*, 93–94. Al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122) connects menstruation and maternal nourishing in his commentary on Q13:8, when he writes, "menstrual blood is nourishment for the child in the womb." Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī al-Musammā Maʿālim al-Tanzīl*, 3:8, 4:297. See also, Ḥaqqī, *Tafsīr Rūḥ al-Bayān*, 4:348.
[32] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 70.
[33] Kristeva, 71.
[34] Klawans, "Was Kristeva Right...about Qumran?," 224.
[35] There is some debate about the purity status of semen. While a number of jurists consider it impure, al-Shāfiʿī considers semen pure in itself but he argues that it nullifies the person's purity status upon exiting the boundaries of the body. For some discussion of debates on the purity of semen, see Katz, *Body of Text*, 169–71.

However, Kristeva's instincts hold some weight in Sufi writings as semen is referenced more regularly in Sufi writings and associated with the holy bodies of male saints,[36] while menstrual blood is rarely if ever cited in association with the holy body of a female saint. The only mention of menstruation I have found in Sufi hagiographical literature is in al-Qushayrī's *Epistle* where it is used abstracted from a female body to prove Abū Bakr al-Shiblī's extensive knowledge of religious laws of purity. While menstruation is addressed in *fiqh* manuals to aid knowledge of the proper purification rituals required, the manner in which al-Qushayrī references menstruation reveals dimensions of gendered construction that benefit the presentation of male Sufis as pious while marginalizing female subjectivity.

> The students of Abū ʿImrān asked al-Shiblī a question about menstruation to embarrass him. Al-Shiblī mentioned the teachings pertaining to this issue as well as disagreements over it. Abū ʿImrān stood up and kissed al-Shiblī on the head saying: "Abū Bakr, I have learned ten statements about this issue which I have not heard before. Out of that which you said, I knew only three teachings![37]

In this anecdote, menstruation operates as a taboo subject and is brought up in al-Shiblī's circle to "embarrass him." Al-Shiblī's nonchalant response demonstrates his piety and the extent of his knowledge such that al-Qushayrī praises him for his ability to handle menstruation as a taboo topic with virtue and wisdom.

By comparison, al-Qushayrī cites the following story about the rulings on semen, which bears some resemblance to the story above but with different gendered implications.

> Another type of shame is the shame of embarrassment, which was characteristic of ʿAlī – may God be pleased with him – when he asked al-Miqdād b. al-Aswad, bearing in mind the status of [the Prophet's daughter] Fāṭima – may God be pleased with her, to ask the Messenger of God – may God bless and greet him – for a ruling concerning the emission of the sperm resulting from foreplay.[38]

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[36] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 251, 264; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 228, 240; Jīlānī, *The Secret of Secrets*, xvii–iii.
[37] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 425; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 404.
[38] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 251; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 228. This ḥadīth appears in *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, 3:18.

While embarrassment as a theme underlies both accounts, ʿAlī's embarrassment marks his piety through his respect for Muḥammad and his desire to shield him from intimate discussions of his daughter, Fāṭima. It is not the topic of semen that is the cause of embarrassment, but the authority and reverence Muḥammad commands in the eyes of ʿAlī as he approaches him about a topic that implicates the daughter who is under his charge. Menstruation operates as a taboo topic in the *Risāla*, while it is Fāṭima who is taboo in the anecdote about semen. In both anecdotes, association with femaleness results in social expectations of embarrassment for men.

Interestingly, Fāṭima, the daughter of Muḥammad, along with Maryam (Mary), are often described as *batūl* (virginal, pure) and are sometimes depicted as having never menstruated.[39] Despite the fact that both women are venerated for their roles as mothers of important male religious figures, their purity is predicated in male-authored writings on their exceptional positions and their incomparability to the rest of women.[40] That some discourses depict their transcendence of typical womanhood through a lack of menstruation demonstrates the narrative use of amenorrhea to render women superior in some way to the rest of their kind. Prior to Mary's birth, Mary's mother believed her to be male. Mary takes on male roles through her service to the temple to which her mother dedicated her.[41]

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[39] Haythamī, *Al-Ṣawāʿiq al-Muḥriqa*, 2:465; Andalusī, *Tafsīr Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, 7:250. For some discussion of their construction as ideal mothers, the discourse of their pristine wombs, and the notions of purity projected unto them, see Kueny, *Conceiving Identities*, 82, 90–92, 106–7. For more discussion of Fāṭima as being exceptionally pure of body, see Ruffle, "An Even Better Creation: The Role of Adam and Eve in Shiʿi Narratives about Fatimah al-Zahra."

[40] The veneration of Fāṭima in Shīʿism involves both an element of her transcendence of typical womanhood and an imitable female model of sanctity. See Ruffle, *Gender, Sainthood, & Everyday Practice in South Asian Shiʿism*, 63–66.

[41] Kueny, *Conceiving Identities*, 88.

These women are thus celebrated through being depicted in varied stations associated with masculinity.

The use of amenorrhea as a status symbol of piety, coupled with notions of masculinity as spiritual purity, provides a method for ascetic women to be depicted as transcending femaleness and to appropriate a spiritual masculinity that could garner them recognition as spiritual masters. Jamal Elias notes,

> Through asceticism, these women denied their sexuality, attempting perhaps to 'become' men. Excessive ascetic exercises in the form of starvation and sleep-deprivation can cause amenorrhea, or halting of the menstrual cycle. This may have been a desired goal for female ascetics, because menstruation is the most tangible justification used in Islamic thought and society to assign an inferior role to women. By ridding themselves of menstruation, they essentially rid themselves of the sign of women's categoric spiritual inferiority to men.[42]

Elias associates amenorrhea and the denial of female sexuality with the masculinization of female ascetics. Kristeva understands impurity as constructed upon female menstruation in patriarchal systems. Al-Ghazālī's notion of purity is coded on masculinity and the male body. Al-Ghazālī marks ascetic fasting as masculine as well in that it helps one retain a sacred purity that allows a person to subsist in a state of prayer and remembrance—which necessitates a state of purity according to Islamic *fiqh* that is usually inaccessible to menstruating and postpartum women. The conflation of menstruation with femaleness and lack of menstruation with maleness, while reductionist in propagating a binary model of gender, illustrates some ways in which male authors negotiated the role of exceptional women by ascribing their piety to their approximation of masculine characteristics.

[42] Elias, "Female and Feminine in Islamic Mysticism," 211.

It is worth addressing how postmenopausal women may figure into this honorary masculinity. Ibn al-Jawzī makes a point to portray Ḥafṣa bt. Sīrīn and Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya as older woman. He describes a group of men telling Ḥafṣa she need not veil herself before them due to her advanced age, based on their reading of Qur'anic verse 24:60.[43] The assumption that her advanced age precludes her sexual desirability allows Ibn al-Jawzī to freely describe her mastery of Qur'anic recitation and her presence amongst male aspirants without overturning social gender expectations. As for Rābiʿa, Ibn al-Jawzī quotes someone saying, "I visited Rābiʿa when she was an old woman of eighty years of age. She looked like a shrunken old water-skin and appeared to be on the verge of collapsing."[44] Here, Rābiʿa's lofty spiritual station is balanced out by her physical weaknesses as an older women. In both cases, the age of these women allows Ibn al-Jawzī to mark their accomplishments without dismantling hegemonic gender hierarchies. Indeed, if older women were construed as a separate gender class from younger women due to androcentric constructions of sexual desirability, then marking prominent Sufi women as older serves as one method of justifying their inclusion as accomplished Sufis in the same way ʿAṭṭār utilized honorary manhood to justify his inclusion of Rābiʿa in his *Tadhkira*.

As I argued in the first chapter, inconsistent approaches to gendering women and non-elite others, particularly anomalous members of various social classes that defy normative socially inscribed behavior, is a prominent feature of androcentric discourse. Such discourse accords elite men a distinct indisputable station while manipulating the

[43] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 270–71.
[44] Sulamī, 276–77.

depictions of others on the basis of each male author's specific desired outcome. Thus, Rābiʿa may function as a *mutajalla* for Ibn al-Jawzī, an older woman beyond sexual desirability, while operating as an honorary man for ʿAṭṭār, who includes her alone amongst the male predecessors of the Sufi tradition in the *Tadhkira*. The mutability of categories of age and gender in Sufi hagiographies allows male authors to re-inscribe masculinity as the Sufi ideal using women and non-elite individuals in the ways they deem most suitable for their purposes.

If ascetic fasting is constructed as the pursuit of purity through adopting androcentric ideals, then female ascetics who fast as a form of devotion and piety can perpetuate androcentric discourse through enacting discourses of masculinity on their bodies. While female ascetic fasting can be read as an act of rebellion and resistance, its inclusion in male-authored Sufi hagiographies points to a different conclusion, namely that androcentric Sufism made room for these women in a way that did not threaten social hegemonic patriarchy.[45] Because of the unattainability of their level as portrayed by male hagiographers, these women become exceptions to the general rule of women.

[45] Saba Mahmood has argued that agency goes beyond resistance and there is value in studying women's agency within the power structures of hegemonic patriarchy. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 153–88. Of course, the records I engage here are male-authored, lending an additional obstacle of authorial bias to the representations of women's agency. Nevertheless, my analysis offers new ways of looking at the depiction of female Sufis and the ways in which their bodily performance of piety can be read both as subversion and reinforcement of the social patriarchal ideals of the male authors from whom we receive their records. For further discussion of Mahmood's theory of agency in medieval Islamic gendered discourse, see Kueny, *Conceiving Identities*, 5.

5.1.4 "Honorary Men": An acceptable class of women?

Mary Douglas offers a salient way of understanding the inclusion of ascetic women in male-authored texts. Douglas offers a tripartite classification of social objects: the acceptable, the ambiguous, and the rejected. She explains,

> In perceiving we are building, taking some cues and rejecting others. The most acceptable cues are those which fit most easily into the pattern that is being built up. Ambiguous ones tend to be treated as if they harmonized with the rest of the pattern. Discordant ones tend to be rejected.[46]

While we may be tempted to categorize ascetic women as discordant, the category of honorary masculinity these women are cast into allows male thinkers to re-establish harmony in their patriarchal systems by separating these women from the rest of their gender category. Women as honorary men are different from the rest of womankind. This separate ambiguous category may explain how male Sufis can distinguish prominent ascetic women as exceptional while upholding the boundaries around them in a rigid and impermeable way so as to render all other women incapable of achieving similar spiritual feats and ranks.

Karen Ruffle describes Sufi hagiographies of women as employing a "(de-)sexing of the saintly body," that allows male authors to acknowledge the piety of female ascetics while eliminating the taboo of addressing their female bodies.[47] She continues,

> …for a man to write about a woman's body violates the ethical division of space into masculine and feminine. One way of circumventing the potential violation of the honor of a female saint is to emphasize her celibacy and asceticism, which obliterate any potential for the disorder (*zina*) that her female sexed body might create. Another way for the male biographer of the female Sufi saint to avoid violating religiously enforced gender codes is through "hagiographical transvestism." If the soul of a female saint is actually male, then

[46] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 45.
[47] Ruffle, *Gender, Sainthood, & Everyday Practice in South Asian Shiʿism*, 64.

> the biographer may consider her earthly body merely a shell concealing her truly masculine essence.

The methods by which male authors narrativize the lives of female ascetics involve pre-emptive strategies that diminish the femaleness of the body of that ascetic. By offering an honorary manhood to female ascetics, male authors minimize the complicated nature of allowing elite male and female bodies to occupy the same discursive space. However, the pre-emptive strategies employed to allow for the presence of female ascetics in Sufi hagiographies counteractively emphasized female physicality in trying to minimize the challenge of its conceptual presence.

The woman championed as a "man of God" can be contrasted to women who are gendered masculine for their social comportment and who thus occupy Douglas' "discordant" category. The first category can be reintegrated into a social patriarchy as they can be used to reinforce knowledge and spiritual accomplishment as masculine attributes, while the latter category is condemned for transgressing social boundaries that reinforce gender differentiation through clothing and comportment. Male authors therefore uphold hierarchies of gender and power through rejecting those who overturn them. Thus, by means of ascetic fasting, male authors used female Sufis to perpetuate patriarchal modes of religiosity through depicting ascetic women as transcending their female social status.

Lack of menstruation also typically indicates a lack of fertility, a correlation recognized in medieval Islamic thought. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Māwardī (d. 448/1058), a Shāfiʿī jurist and a Basran contemporary of al-Qushayrī's, writes in his commentary on verse 11:71 of the Qur'an, "Menstruation can represent glad tidings of childbirth as she who does

not menstruate cannot birth [a child]."[48] This interpretation appears in the context of the Qur'anic story of Abraham and Sarah receiving news that Sarah will bear children in her advanced age.[49] Through transcending both menstrual ability and fertility, a female ascetic can renounce her womanhood in the eyes of her male counterparts in service to her piety. A woman thus gains authority through being rendered "sexually neuter" in the presence of men.[50] While this may grant her an alternative form of masculinity in ritual contexts, its social repercussions can also result in a damaging reputation. Katherine Kueny discusses the disdain for barren women in some medieval Islamic contexts, writing that while, "barrenness [could have] a positive effect in that it protects one from the iniquities of excess wealth and distraction from God," barrenness was also associated with impiety and considered a punishment for weakness.[51]

Another way that male authors neutralize depictions of powerful spiritual women is by offering accounts of these women being physically weakened by their excessive ascetic exercises, as Ibn al-Jawzī did by portraying Rābiʿa as on the verge of collapsing on account of her ascetic devotions. The ways in which women who undertook voluntary fasting are depicted in Sufi hagiographical literature demonstrates the extent to which these portrayals further gender ascetic women as inferior and foreground their femaleness

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[48] Māwardī, *Al-Nukat wa al-ʿuyūn, Tafsīr al-Māwardī*, 2:484.
[49] For information on interpretations of Sarah's laughter as a euphemism for menstruation, see Stetkevych, "Sarah and the Hyena."
[50] Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014, 47. This tenuous masculine authority would not necessarily be available to women of lower social classes, whose hard labor and poor nutrition may have induced amenorrhea anyway.
[51] Kueny, *Conceiving Identities*, 48, 83, 120. For more discussion of infertility in Islamic jurisprudence, see Part I of Verskin, *Barren Women*.

through making their bodies textually visible. The following section of this chapter investigates how reading piety in corporeal terms further marginalized ascetic women through the hagiographical use of language that gendered their bodies differently from that of male ascetics.

5.2 Emaciation and corporeal readability: From al-Sulamī to Ibn al-Jawzī

Gendered language sets apart the emaciation of women, treated as a loss of physical mass and sexual desirability, from the emaciation of men, treated instead as a loss of mental acuity. Beginning with al-Sulamī, discourses of female emaciation in Sufi literature, while purporting to foreground women's piety, further perpetuated conflations of women with lowly embodiment and men with elevated spirituality.[52] Hagiographical literature on exceptionally pious female mystics and ascetics seems to offer women elevated spiritual status by foregrounding their ascetic devotion. However, after al-Sulamī and particularly in Ibn al-Jawzī's writings, female ascetic devotion is presented through the lens of women shedding the aspects of their feminine physicality. While presenting these women as having transcended their gender category, Ibn al-Jawzī and those after him highlight this transcendence through gendered language that further foregrounds the physicality of these female mystics. Thus, in presenting women who have diminished socially gendered markers in their bodies, male authors made the femaleness of their bodies even more transparent. Since these corporeal depictions are not balanced with instances of female subjectivity and intellectual capacity, these women are presented in more embodied ways

[52] Ayubi, *Gendered Morality*, 58–63.

than before. This foregrounding of piety as inscribed on the body establishes a representational form of female spirituality that further conflates femaleness with embodiment and female spirituality with bodily practices.

Through the physical consequences of female ascetic fasting, women could shed social markers of femaleness in order to access hegemonic spiritual influence—but only in a way that made their embodiment and physicality more present to the male gaze. This section investigates how descriptions of female ascetic fasting shifted over a period of two centuries, between al-Sulamī and Ibn al-Jawzī, to illuminate how practices that could potentially neutralize gendered perceptions of the female body ultimately reinforced gendered discourse by perpetuating and reproducing male/female differentiation through the language of male hagiographers.

Al-Sulamī's records of eighty-two early proto-Sufi women do not diverge to any noticeable degree in descriptions of piety from the 104 male proto-Sufis in his *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*—[53]except in one particularly interesting case of an ascetic woman called ʿAwna al-Naysābūriyya. In all the other entries, both male and female, al-Sulamī makes little reference to the bodies of his Sufi predecessors, except in the case of weeping that leads to blindness.[54] In ʿAwna's entry, however, al-Sulamī describes her as *ṣafīqa,* which Cornell translates as "emaciated" and "extreme in her self-denial."[55] The Arabic word *ṣafīqa*

[53] Melchert, "Before Ṣūfiyyāt," November 2016, 116.
[54] For more on weeping as a form of piety, see Silvers, "Early Pious, Mystic, and Sufi Women," 2014, 32–35. There is no indication that weeping as a devotional practice was more predominant with any particular gender. Both male and female Sufis are depicted as weeping out of piety in Sufi sources. There is also a Qur'anic precedent for pious weeping in Jacob's mourning for the loss of his son Joseph, see Q12:84.
[55] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 220–21.

indicates persistence and endurance in one's efforts, but has secondary meanings of compactness and folding in on oneself.[56] In Cornell's translation, ʿAwna's body is "read" as evidence of her dedication to ascetic practices of abstaining from food.

Why does Cornell make ʿAwna's body so visible in this entry through her interpretation of the somewhat more ambiguous Arabic? In subsequent centuries, female ascetics were in fact read corporeally, particularly in Ibn al-Jawzī's *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*—which Cornell references in her appendix to *Early Sufi Women*. It became commonplace for Ibn al-Jawzī and those following him to gender ascetic fasting and exercises through assigning different descriptors to male and female bodies that are ravaged by the effects of deliberate starvation. Thus, it is possible that Cornell read Ibn al-Jawzī's penchant for reading female asceticism corporeally into al-Sulamī's entry on ʿAwna.

Katherine Kueny theorizes the maternal body as a body made transparent through patriarchal intervention.[57] Medieval Islamicate medical literature isolates a number of physical signs through which to "read" the female body and thereby claim knowledge of its inner reality. This notion of transparency is relevant to our analysis here as the female body, even aside from its maternal functionality, is "read" by male scholars in an attempt to discern the inner spiritual reality of female ascetics and Sufis. The male body is rarely read in this way, as the inner reality of men's thoughts, motivations and spiritual stations are already made visible through spiritual subjectivity and the ubiquity of male views in writing that naturalize the male perspective as the default.

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[56] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān Al-ʿArab*, q.v. "Ṣafaqa."
[57] Kueny, *Conceiving Identities*, 73–75.

Ibn al-Jawzī revises many of al-Sulamī's entries on women, adding significantly more corporeal details that move the focus away from the teachings and subjective mystical experiences of women, to augment the readability and visibility of women's bodies. For example, as noted before, Ibn al-Jawzī describes Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya as like a *shann* or "a shrunken old water-skin."[58] He also writes that Syrian mystic Rābiʿa bt. Ismāʿīl used to measure the loss of her piety by the amount of fat her upper arm retained.[59] He describes Khansāʾ bt. Khidam from Yemen as "skin and bones"[60] and a woman that attempted to seduce Rābiʿ as later devoting herself to worship such that she became like a "burnt out tree trunk."[61] By comparison, Ibn al-Jawzī only reads one man corporeally through his ascetic fasting, describing Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī (a companion of Muḥammad) as having fasted until he became like a toothpick (*khalal*).[62] Ibn al-Jawzī marks fasting as an ascetic inclination in at least eleven male entries[63] and at least eight female entries[64] but marks only one man's body out of eleven while making visible the bodies of seven out of eight women described as undertaking fasting as an ascetic practice.[65]

The increased textual visibility of women's bodies between al-Sulamī's time and Ibn al-Jawzī's indicates the level to which women's self-discipline and spirituality became

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[58] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 276–77.
[59] Sulamī, 316–17.
[60] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, #251.
[61] Ibn al-Jawzī, #471. Cf. The story of Jurayj in Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 383; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 364.
[62] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, #60.
[63] Ibn al-Jawzī, #44, #60, #122, #188, #355, #427, #442, #524, #529, #547, #611.
[64] Ibn al-Jawzī, #205, #251, #471, #588, #823, #824, #908, #932.
[65] The heightened visibility of women's bodies in these entries stands in contrast to the idealized erasure of free women's visibility under the social rules of modesty. For some background on gender segregation and the maintenance of women's privacy, see Mazumdar and Mazumdar, "Rethinking Public and Private Space"; Papanek, "Purdah."

inscribed upon their corporeal selves. In previous chapters, I argued that centering male bodies and experiences actualized masculinity as the spiritual default and marginalized women as the object other. Through discourses of female ascetic fasting, the objectified female body eclipses female subjectivity even further, making women's piety negligible or unintelligible except through a complete reduction of the self to markers inscribed on one's outer form. Differentiating these two constructions of the embodied self as subject or object allows us to note how "pervasive male subjectivity" [66] is constructed and centered and how female subjectivity is marginalized through the instrumental use of female body as text in narratively performative ways.[67]

5.2.1 Inscribing emaciation on female bodies and male minds

Sufi writers prior to Ibn al-Jawzī referred to the impact of excessive voluntary fasting on the body. Al-Ghazālī notes in his *Kitāb kasr al-shahwatayn* a teaching by Abū Sulaymān al-Darānī (d. 220/835) in which he says, "the best form of worship for me is an empty stomach attached to my back."[68] The use of physical markers and especially the verb *iltiṣāq* (attachment) to indicate ascetic fasting through the caving in of the body is largely absent in descriptions of male worship and asceticism. In Ibn al-Jawzī's writings, such evocative images of emaciation become more commonplace but are attributed to female bodies. Alternatively, male entries rarely describe the effect of fasting on the male body but sometimes addresses the impact of starvation on the mind and even on a man's

[66] Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy*, 44.
[67] Bashir, *Sufi Bodies*, 45.
[68] Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-Dīn*, 3:85; Ghazālī, *Curbing the Two Appetites*, 50.

ability to speak.[69] As a result of Ibn al-Jawzī's language choices, male subjectivity is preserved and their inner worlds are made visible while female subjectivity is discarded in favor of objectification that diminishes female selfhood to what is visible on the body.

Two particular entries in the *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa* provide relevant contrasts in how Ibn al-Jawzī describes male and female ascetics who undergo voluntary fasting. Ibn al-Jawzī describes Khansāʾ bt. Khidam as a "great beauty like a fattened camel adorned for sacrifice," until through fasting her "her skin attached to her bones" (*iltaṣaqa jilduhā bi-ʿaḍmihā*).[70] Ibn al-Jawzī describes her as having cried till her eyes went blind, fasted till her skin clung to her bones and prayed until her legs gave out underneath her. He cites very similar markers of piety for Zajla al-ʿĀbida, a client (*mawla*) of Muʿāwiya, "She fasted until she darkened in color, she cried until she became weak-sighted and she prayed until she was forced to sit."[71] The conflation of fasting and excessive worship in female bodies with weakness, loss of beauty, restricted physical mobility, and illness is absent in male entries. In an account of one male Sufi nicknamed Saʿdūn al-Majnūn (Saʿdūn The Insane), Ibn al-Jawzī writes, "Saʿdūn was one of those who experienced love for God (*maḥabba*). He fasted sixty years until his mind diminished (*khaffa*). So the people called him "mad" due to his speech frequently reverting to (the subject of) love."[72] In another entry, Ibn al-Jawzī notes that ʿĪsā b. Zādān, a preacher from Ubulla, fasted until he lost his voice.[73] In

[69] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, #355, #611.
[70] Ibn al-Jawzī, #251.
[71] Ibn al-Jawzī, #604.
[72] Ibn al-Jawzī, #355.
[73] Ibn al-Jawzī, #611.

these entries, excessive abstinence from food is marked as a loss of physical mass and beauty for women and a loss of mental faculty and communicative ability for men.

While Saʿdūn's entry is exceptional in that most male entries that allude to ascetic fasting do not describe its effects on men at all, the reference to his insanity echoes classical constructions of gender that separate men as fundamentally different from and superior to women in intellectual and mental capacity. Zahra Ayubi notes the construction of classical masculinity upon the intellect and mental faculties in Islamic ethics in contradistinction to the construction of femininity and femaleness on matter and embodiment.[74] As Scott Kugle suggests, the dichotomy set up between mind and body often puts women at a disadvantage. He writes, "Women are more closely associated with the body in patriarchal systems and thus are the victims of family control, social inequality, and moral censure."[75] By locating the effects of ascetic fasting in the female body and the male mind, Ibn al-Jawzī and other Sufi hagiographers emphasize relationships between womanhood and materiality, while foregrounding relationships between manhood and mental faculty. Thus, these authors reinforce the status of women as secondary objects to the male gaze operating within a frame of reference constructed upon elite male subjectivity.[76]

While al-Sulamī foregrounds women's relationships to other mystics and ascetics and preserves a number of their teachings and practices, Ibn al-Jawzī seems to have diminished the female subject by reading ascetic women's bodies for proof of their piety

[74] Ayubi, *Gendered Morality*, 60–61.
[75] Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*, 87.
[76] Ayubi, *Gendered Morality*, 61.

rather than exploring their social and spiritual lives. Thus, despite the potential of ascetic fasting for granting women some recognition as spiritual masters and authorities in a highly patriarchal system, Ibn al-Jawzī's work demonstrates how such efforts can be reversed through gender-specifying language that makes some bodies visible and primary and others secondary to the intellectual contributions and spiritual lives of their possessors. Through a critical analysis of Sufi hagiographical entries, we discern the ways in which gender is highlighted or diminished through the simple work of choosing specific words to describe someone's behavior. Similarly, this analysis reveals how language can simultaneously uphold social hegemonic systems even while it contains the potential to challenge them by showcasing exceptional members of subjugated classes in ways that initially may seem unusually empowering for these socially inferior individuals.

5.2.2 An alternate account of emaciation and the transparent body of male youths

Al-Qushayrī offers only one account of emaciation in his *Risāla*. The anecdote shares the typical features of the trickster tales I analyzed in Chapter Three. Here, an elite male Sufi teacher questions a male youth (*ghulām*) about his emaciated state. The youth denies any excessive ascetic exercises that would have resulted in such a state, but expresses his passionate desire for God (*hawā*) and is upbraided by his teacher as a result. The youth then asks God to take him if his desire is genuine to prove his sincerity to his teacher. The youth immediately dies.

> ʿAbd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd looked at a male youth from among his students whose body had become emaciated and said, "Young man, have you been fasting constantly?" He answered, "[No,] and nor do I prolong my eating (*iftār*)." He then asked, "Do you stay awake all night?" He answered: "[No,] and nor do I prolong my sleep." He then asked, "So what, then, has emaciated you?" He answered: "Never-ending desire and never-ending

> concealment of it." ʿAbd al-Wāḥid exclaimed: "Be silent! How dare you!" The youth sprang to his feet, walked a couple of steps, and said, "Oh, my God, if I am sincere, take me!" Then, he fell down dead.[77]

We can analyze this anecdote in conjunction with a story al-Qushayrī presents immediately before it. In this story, Abū ʿAbbās al-Dinawarī confronts an old woman in his public session for openly displaying an ecstatic state and he upbraids her, telling her, "Die!" Like the youth above, she stands up, walks a few steps, and dies. Both these stories depict a non-elite individual showing spiritual mastery over death to prove elite male Sufi teachers wrong in their initial impressions of these deviant others. The similarity of the stories and their placement together in al-Qushayrī's *Risāla* demonstrates the extent to which al-Qushayrī understood older women and male youths as occupying the same category as deviations from the elite male ideal. Al-Qushayrī does not present any elite male Sufi teachers as emaciated, only this male adolescent whose body is made textually visible to the reader as his elite male teacher tries to discern his spiritual station from physical marks on his body. The trickster-like appearance of the youth to deliver a lesson about sincerity is for the benefit of the elite male teacher and presumably the elite male reader, who al-Qushayrī hopes to inspire to cultivate the spiritual virtues that a mere old woman and a male youth are able to attain.

Emaciation in Nishapuri Sufi biographies and the later hagiographies inspired by them functions as a tool that augments the textual visibility of the body of the non-elite non-male other. The elite men of the Nishapuri Sufi tradition privileged their own spiritual subjectivity and observer status as normative, rendering other individuals to the status of

[77] Qushayrī, *Risāla*, 246–47; Qushayrī, *Epistle*, 224.

objects to be visually analyzed and dissected for evidence of what is hidden within. Kueny suggests that medieval male physicians and scholars rendered the maternal body of women "transparent" through developing techniques for reading the state of a women's pregnancy by means of sings visible on her external corporeal self.[78] Such techniques centered the authority of elite men, allowing them to determine the reality of a pregnant woman's state and reducing her capacity to determine and care for her own body. In a similar way, by centering the elite male gaze, Sufi authors augmented the textual visibility of the body of socially marginalized others such that their piety could be read and made externally visible to their elite male leaders. Ash Geissinger theorizes "looking relations" in Sufi literature that normatively center elite male authority.[79] As this chapter has demonstrated, al-Sulamī, al-Qushayrī and Ibn al-Jawzī's use corporeal language to establish patriarchal looking relations through examining the piety of the other by reading their physical bodies. The frequency of corporeal reading of female and non-elite piety reinforces elite male authority discursively and offers evidence of widening gaps of gender differentiation in Sufi hagiographical literature.

5.3 Conclusion

The invention and extension of the category of honorary men to women deemed spiritually accomplished allowed some women who transcended the boundaries of their socially-determined gender to achieve some amount of power through recognition as pious members of the Sufi tradition. However, the piety of these women was determined through

[78] Kueny, *Conceiving Identities*, 72–75.
[79] Geissinger, "Female Figures, Marginality, and Qurʾanic Exegesis in Ibn al-Jawzī's Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa," 2–3.

discourses that paradoxically rendered them other by foregrounding their physicality and diminishing their subjectivity. Similarly, non-elite male individuals were made textually visible through their bodies in such a way as to discursively differentiate them from their elite male counterparts. Despite depictions of some of these socially-othered individuals as spiritually accomplished, the women, youths, and non-elite men of the Sufi tradition do not necessarily represent rebels who succeeded at dismantling the social boundaries that often kept them from attaining any hegemonic authority. In fact, in many ways, exceptional women, youths and non-elite men in Sufi stories and hagiographies were reintegrated into the patriarchal system as ambiguous but ultimately unthreatening to hegemonic patriarchal Sufism. This allowed the valorization of exceptional individuals who deviate from the elite male ideal so long as they remained exceptional and unrepresentative of the rest of their socially prescribed gender category. Such androcentric depictions of the other maintains the priority of the elite male subject in Sufi discourses and institutions of power.

The role of language in maintaining gendered boundaries can be discerned in Ibn al-Jawzī's description of different male and female ascetics who took up similar practices of devotion. The increased readability of female piety as inscribed on their bodies over the course of two centuries indicates how central gender differentiation was to Sufi authors who chose to memorialize female ascetics. Whereas al-Sulamī obliquely describes only one woman as being emaciated on account of her devotions, Ibn al-Jawzī foregrounds corporeal emaciation in nearly all his entries on women whose spirituality was characterized by ascetic fasting. Additionally, the effects of ascetic fasting are marked as a

loss of mental capacity in one male entry and a loss of voice in another.[80] These trends offer further evidence of the conflation of women and non-elite male individuals with materiality and embodiment and elite men with rational faculties. The intentional use of gendered language in Sufi hagiography that emphasizes the primacy of the female/deficient male body and the elite male mind indicates the ways in which gender acts as a key tool in the negotiation of Sufi identity during the classical period.

Finally, I want to return to ʿAwna al-Naysābūriyya to highlight the lack of subjective voices in citations of female ascetics. As I noted in Chapter Two, al-Sulamī writes that ʿAwna said, "I repent my prayers and my fasting as the fornicator repents his fornication and the thief repents his theft."[81] Without further context, ʿAwna's words can be interpreted in multiple ways. Is ʿAwna unsatisfied with the level of sincerity in her devotions or is she renouncing ascetic practices as futile to spiritual attainment? In other words, is she practicing Malamātism through self-deprecation for personal cultivation or is she functioning here as a mouthpiece for al-Sulamī who began the process of transitioning Sufism away from asceticism? As the object of al-Sulamī's gaze, her subjective experience and understanding of her own devotions remains invisible to us. Thus, while her body has been made transparent, her intentions are occluded from view.

[80] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb Ṣifat al-Ṣafwa*, #355, #611.
[81] Sulamī, *Early Sufi Women*, 1999, 220–21.

6 Conclusion

Through a case study of four different ascetic practices, self-mortification (*zuhd*), wandering without provision (*siyāḥa*), sexual abstinence (*ʿuzla*, *ʿafāf*), and ascetic fasting (*sawm*, *jūʿ*), I have demonstrated how gender is constructed in a variety of culturally and historically specific ways. Through analyzing Nishapuri Sufi writings through the lens of gender, I have indicated the ways in which dominant forms of Sufism that include discourses of inner renunciation and diminished bodily performances of asceticism were born out of a specific period of urban factionalism in medieval Nishapur. In contradistinction to scholars who argue Baghdadi Sufism became the dominant form of Islamic mysticism, I argue Nishapuri Sufism, dogged by local rivalries and Malāmati inclinations, had a greater influence on subsequent modes of Islamic mysticism. The ways in which gender as a conceptual language of power mediated Nishapuri Sufi struggles for boundaries were documented in this dissertation through an analysis of Sufi hagiographies over a period of two centuries, from al-Sulamī to Ibn al-Jawzī. A marked increase in gender differentiation over this duration of time has been brought to light.

This study demonstrates the usefulness of gender analysis in discerning historical currents and sociopolitical forces in the shaping of new movements and the formation of new religious identities. Gender discourses are varied and ever-changing, so it is useful to embark upon gender analysis first by analyzing primary sources for constructions of gender apparent within the specific sociohistorical debates of their authors. An intersectional analysis that takes into account race, class, social status, age and political or religious

ideology can yield fruitful understandings of how gender is conceived and more importantly how it is used as a language to mediate power, authority and identity.

In Chapter One, the Introduction, I offered a survey of previous scholarship on gender and Sufism as well as an overview of my intersectional gender-sensitive methodology. The transformation of Sufism in the context of Nishapuri struggles against Karrāmiya led to specific constructions of gender boundaries in ascetic ideology. In Chapter Two, I explored how rivals and enemies were gendered as deficient men in Nishapuri Sufi discourse. I demonstrated how Nishapuri authors debated the validity of *zuhd* as an expression of Sufi spirituality, using gender discourse to establish boundaries around orthodox mystical and ascetic practice. In Chapter Three, I investigated the institutionalization of Sufism as a matter of gendered urban geography. In Chapter Four, I analyzed gender differentiation in interpersonal communal relationships and particularly in the marriages of Sufi practitioners. In Chapter Five, I explored the idea of transparent bodies as applied to female Sufi practitioners such that the male body was centered and rendered invisible in favor of the mind and intellect while the female body was "read" and relegated to the margins of Sufi practice. The five chapters of this dissertation offer a complex and nuanced view of gender that illuminates the forces that shaped Nishapuri Sufism in ways that persisted beyond the immediate context of al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī. These gendered discourses left an imprint on later Sufi authors and schools of thought.

Ultimately, people put gender to work in complex ways to create social order and build institutions. Notions of Sufi asceticism transforming into love mysticism oversimplify a complex and ongoing process of gendering and institutionalization that

mirrors continuing negotiations of masculinity and the ideal human being. Scholars who conflate asceticism with male spirituality and love mysticism with female spirituality reinforce a gender binary and gender essentialism that associates men with harsh discipline and women with gentle intimacy and love. This study demonstrates that it is the negotiation of dominant masculinity that inspired and provoked Nishapuri authors to advocate for an inward turn away from asceticism towards a Sufism that centered homosocial networks of men in Sufi orders.

Although al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī left an indelible mark on later Sufi authors and shaped a number of Sufi institutions, later Sufism renegotiated gender in ways that both employed and subverted the constructions Nishapuri Sufis put in place. Ahmet Karamustafa investigates the Qalandars, Abdals of Rum and Haydaris in the late medieval and early modern period as examples of groups who rejected the urban institutionalization of Sufism that al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī helped establish. These antinomian ascetics flouted the hierarchies and chains of authority Sufi mystics implemented and developed. The very institutions that granted the elite Sufis of Nishapur validity and hegemonic authority became new battlegrounds for constructions of new types of asceticism. Where al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī sought to align their Malāmati ideals with Ashʿarī-Shāfiʿī Sunni orthodoxy, some later ascetics fought to free themselves of the urban social strictures of their predecessors. The process of negotiating identity is an ongoing act of separation and reintegration of social and political ideals. Further study of these antinomian groups, particularly through a critical historical and gender-sensitive lens, can offer new insights into the legacy of Nishapuri Sufism and the ways in which it continues to be contested.

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